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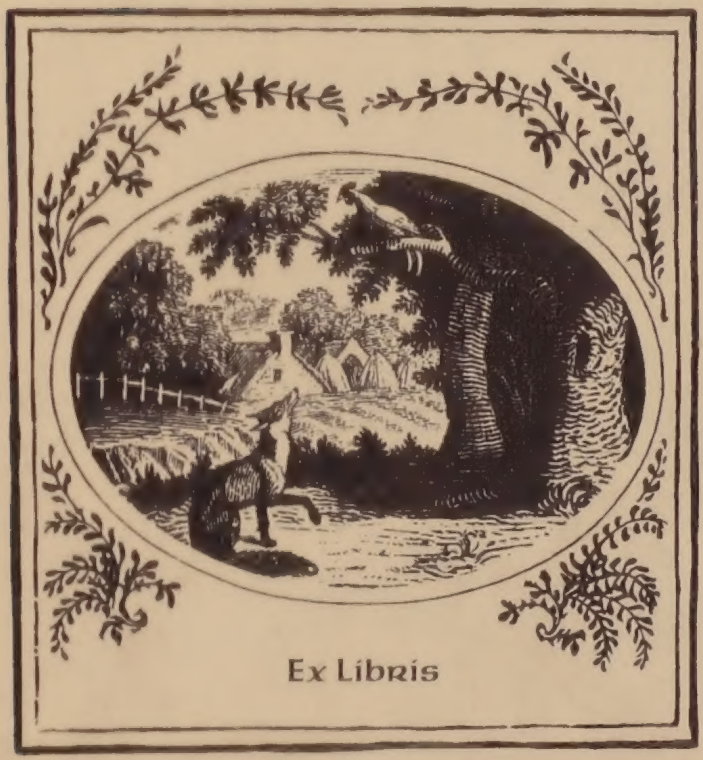

John and Martha Daniels

A BOX FOR THE SEASON.

A Sporting Sketch.

BY CHARLES CLARKE,

AUTHOR OF 'CHARLIE THORNHILL.'

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

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A BOX FOR THE SEASON.

CHAPTER I.

TO LUSHENHAM.

It was a remarkably fine morning in the beginning of August, 18—, when a pair-horse fly drove into the quiet village of Lushenham, in ——shire, exciting the attention of the few women and children who were idling or working at the cottage doors. The old springs rattled over the hard ruts, which were now dried by the summer sun. and which presented as substantial an obstacle to the wheels of a fly as the kerb-stone of a London street; for Lushenham stood upon clay, in the middle of England, and was famous only for the biggest fences, the widest brook, the largest grass-field, and the sloshiest mud in the kingdom.

"Rachel, attend to your sampler," said the village schoolmistress, as the unruly children got excited by the unwonted liveliness of the street; and, "Jack Hornby, if you looks arter your betters, instead of arter your letters, in that way, I'll take it out o' your back," said old Scareham, the schoolmaster, as Master Hornby, imbibing a spirit of rhyme, if not of poetry, from the parish Dominie, had just exclaimed: "My hye, if there hain't a fly!"—a use of the aspirates partly to be ascribed to the commotion of his feelings, and partly to the peculiarity of the ——shire vernacular.

At the same instant there popped from out of the fly window the rosiest of gills, and the very largest regalia on record.

"Now then, stupid, where are you going? This can't be the way to Boulter's Farm, in the middle of the village!"

Up came the horses with a sudden jerk, worthy of a Piccadilly coachman, which shook off the cigar-ash, and slightly damaged the protruding Lincoln and Bennett.

"Yes, this must be the way, sir. The

man on the hill said it was close to the church—a large red-brick building; and here is the church, and there's the farm-house just beyond it."

The owner of the discomposed hat and regalia drew them in again: the flyman resumed his journey, and gave a rapid thought to an old proverb on the vicinity of the church, and its application to his two insides.

Jehu was not a first-class coachman, but, catching sight of the farmer's wife, or the tenant *in esse*, he determined upon presenting the tenants *in posse* in as distinguished a form as he could. He rounded the corner of the wall which led to the farm-yard gate, and which appeared to be the only or principal entrance to the domain, with two or three take-it-among-ye sort of cuts. The near horse, a little bit done, and pressed by his companion, who responded immediately to the application of the whip, gave rather a lurch than a bound, bringing the near wheel of the fly in contact with the gate-post. Causes have their

effects even in Lushenham; and though this was simple, it was very decided: it landed the flyman, on the top of his head, in a heap of manure, which saved him further trouble, and brought up Mr. Thomas Crackenthorpe and his friend Bobby Munster all standing, as the sailors have it, for it sent their heads straight into the opposite corners of the fly, and presented them with a sensation of fireworks about the nose and eyes which would have been invaluable to our one-eyed aunt, when her absence from Vauxhall used to be deplored in such melting terms. However, nothing was broken but the gate-post: the flyman was set upright again; the fly and horses stuck fast, and seemed glad enough to stick there; and the heroes of the little adventure were extricated by the buxom lady who was there to do the honours of the house.

It was not perhaps an auspicious manner of entering Lushenham for the first time, but Tom Crackenthorpe was one of those jovial good fellows that never trouble their heads about anything but the result. Be-

ing therefore on his legs, and the tingling sensation beginning to subside from his nose, he began at once to collect his ideas for the business he had on hand, and which had brought him and his friend Munster from the pleasant and lively little town of Pumpington, in the middle of the season. It was no other than this—an advertisement; and when advertisements deal in the marvellous, to the extent that they generally do in the present day, we say that the result produced is not by any means adequate to the cause. Our surprise is, that the pleasure of seeing or purchasing Boulter's Farm, as an investment, had not brought two-thirds of the young men with available funds at once into collision for at least the investigation of such a property. It was described, in all the glowing colours of an auctioneer's pen, as "the most charming retreat from the fatigues of business or the haunts of pleasure; situated in the midst of a fertile valley, alike fitted for the profitable employments of the dairy, and the more invigorating calling of the chase;

within easy reach of two railways, and four packs of hunting dogs, whose fleetness and reputation were the admiration of the first sportsmen of England." The house was described as "large and commodious, calculated at once for the comforts of two or three single men, or for the more extensive arrangements of married life. Stabling for eight horses, various loose boxes, out-houses, and other conveniences to meet the requirements of the modern sportsmen. The whole to be let or sold, with or without 160 acres of the finest pasture-land in the world."

Such was the advertisement which met the eye of Tom Crackenthorpe, as he sat at breakfast at 'The George,' at Pumpington, tampering with an egg and a cup of tea, after what is commonly known as "a night." He had long wanted to give up Pumpington and its enervating pleasures. He had made up his mind that hunting, to be hunting, should be followed by one sound bottle of old port, and a night's rest; and that it should be done from your own home in the middle

of the shires. He began to be quite tired of the attentions of the M. C. of the Pumpington Rooms, of the eternal smiles and fading dresses of the young women, of the never-dying tea and turbans of the old. He began to tire of losing his small change to people who had always forgotten their purses, or had nothing less than a note in their pocket, when their turn came to pay; and, altogether, a couple of years at the spa had shown him the advantages of independence in more matters than one, which could never be enjoyed in the thraldom of watering-place respectability. Tom had already looked at one or two places which he thought might suit him for a four-months' residence in the winter, and give him at least an amphibious position between a landed proprietor and a gentleman from town; but he had not yet satisfied himself. One was too much of a place; another had not sufficient stabling; another looked like a citizen's villa at Brixton; and a fourth like a consumptive hospital, or a lunatic asylum with the bars down. In

short, it did not seem so easy a matter to settle the whereabouts of a young man with about 1000*l.* per annum, when he wanted most of the luxuries and all the conveniences of about 6000*l.* a-year. The present advertisement, however, struck him at once as the very thing: Boulter's Farm implied a purely agricultural situation; Lushenham was eminently distinguished as a hunting position, let alone the auctioneer's embellishment of the "hunting dogs;" and the proximity of two railways secured to him the opportunity of visiting the metropolis during a temporary frost. He had read the advertisement twice over, and had just decided that eggs and toast were less appetizing than strong tea, when the coffee-room door opened and Bobby Munster made his appearance.

"Are you a man of your word, Bobby?"

"Did ye ever know an Irishman tell a lie?" replied Mr. Munster.

"Oh, you're not an Irishman; you only pretend to be, because the women are so fond of them. Do you feel inclined to

leave this place, Bobby, and go into the country?"

"Not till after the 29th: I'm engaged to Clara Jones."

"Good heavens, man! what in the world have you been doing?" said Tom Crackenthorpe in evident alarm, and seeing his vision of mutual Lushenham comfort crumbling away; "don't you know that she hasn't a shilling; and that her miserable old mother is only trying to catch somebody? Besides, what in the name of fortune will you do with the hunting when you're married?"

"Married!" said Bobby; "I'm not going to be married."

"But you must be some day, if you are engaged, you know," said the other, who was honest enough to see as far down the well as that.

"I mean engaged for the first waltz at the Hospital Ball. Marry! Bedad, Crackenthorpe, I'd like to see the Governor's face when we came to the settlements! He

wouldn't like the little place in Connemara upon parchment."

"Then you've no objection to give up Pumpington for the winter."

"Not I; if not, Pumpington will soon give up me."

"Well, then, read that;" saying which he placed in his friend's hands the advertisement before alluded to, and lit a mighty regalia by a match which was placed ready upon the mantelpiece.

As Crackenthorpe said, it certainly looked well upon paper. The proposal had its charms, too, for Mr. Munster; who was one of those gentlemen who, living far beyond their means, are obliged to be beholden to their wits. Fortunately Robert Munster, Esq., was not deficient in this respect. He had a father alive, from whom he received an uncertain income, and had certain expectations: whether they are to be realized or not we may see hereafter. He was an Irishman, as he affirmed, though long residence in England had enabled him to adopt or shake off just as much of

his nationality as he pleased. He was an adept at most games; rode and shot moderately well; was never out of temper, nor out of countenance; frequently out of pocket; had been at Oxford and taken a degree; called himself a barrister, and was supposed to be eating himself to fame in the Temple Hall, instead of drinking himself into notoriety at Pumpington. He was a very amusing companion; highly susceptible; lived upon his friends as much as possible, and made no secret of doing so. He rode their horses, drank their wine, ate their dinners, and not unfrequently wore their clothes; but he was invaluable to the idle or the hypochondriac; and it was, after all, rather difficult to say on which side lay the obligation. It at once occurred to him that the horses would be as acceptable, and the port as good, in one place as another; and that his own share of expenses at Lushenham might be considerably lower than those which he was already incurring at Pumpington, for the necessaries of lodging, washing, and the livery of two horses,

which formed the basis of operations for attacks upon innumerable studs.

"Suppose we go at once: we can chat about our arrangements as we go; for there's not much time to lose between this and November."

"I can't go before to-morrow; besides, I must write to the agent for particulars: and, if it looks likely, we must get old Grabhall and Keepitt to see the agent, and do the parchments. I know nothing about that." Here Crackenthorpe took two prolonged yawns, a very hard pull or two at the regalia, which was beginning to fail under the interest of the conversation, and stated his intention of driving to Clench the dealer, to look at a hack which he thought might carry him to cover and go in harness next season. "Would Bobby go with him?" Of course he would: and on their way they ordered the fly which carried them to Lushenham the following morning.

CHAPTER II.

A GRASS COUNTRY.

We have endeavoured to give a sufficient reason in our last chapter for the sudden appearance in an out-of-the-way village of two rather dashing young men in a Pumpington fly. The lady of the house, or, in other words, Mrs. Simcox, the wife of the tenant of Boulter's Farm, received the two gentlemen in the best parlour, wiping and dusting down the chairs with her apron; ringing the bell for her maid, who, when she did appear, looked more like a cinder with a cap on than a human being; and tidying herself with her unemployed hand during the proceedings. She apologized for the stupidity of the flyman and her own want of preparation in the same breath, and ended by asking in the most impressive

manner what the gentlemen would take to drink this hot day. Simcox was up in the field; but he should be sent for immediately, as the young horse could not be seen out without his permission. He was so very particular—"Bless us, one 'ud think there was no more young Belzonis in the world." And if Mrs. Simcox knew as much about it as we do, she would have quite appreciated her husband's care. Both the gentlemen would take a glass of ale, which they did; and hoped Mrs. Simcox did not dislike smoking, which she did not; and then they told her that they were not come after the young horse, and her face fell. It rose again, however, before long when they told her the real nature of their errand: thought it strange the agent did not let them know, and proceeded to expatiate upon the beauties of the situation, the fertility of the soil, and the excellence of the water, about the least interesting piece of intelligence that could have been conveyed to either the one or the other. To make matters plain, however, let us give a description of Lushen-

ham and its advantages; and as we love truth, we will neither pale the lily nor paint the rose.

Lushenham is a small, and was an insignificant, village, until modern *furore* for hunting rescued it from its obscurity, and filled its neighbourhood with sportsmen, stud-grooms, helpers, and the necessary adjuncts to the national taste. At the time of which we write, some few years ago, it consisted of straggling labourers' cottages; long, low farm-buildings, since converted into stables and boxes; an old-fashioned farm-house; a church, rectory, and schools; and the Hall, the Squire's residence, on the side of the hill, embowered in trees and shrubberies, and approached from the village by a long winding walk, always muddy, and generally unswept. It was situated in a valley, through which flowed a brook, even then famous in the annals of the chase; presenting at no point less than a good fourteen feet of water, and at most points from sixteen feet to twenty. Many a whip lies

buried beneath its waters; possibly boots and spurs; for it is as muddy below as it is broad at the top; and, though we never heard of a hat with a head in it, we still think it possible that there are some mysteries at the bottom of Lushenham Brook that we know nothing about. The ground rises on every side of it: here and there steep; but usually in gentle slopes of rich grass, which proclaim its capabilities for fattening oxen and blowing horses. Once on the top, the country discloses to view a succession of large pastures, yawning ditches, and thick timber rails, with venerable blackthorn fences, which have been ignorant of the hand of the hedger for many a long year. The roads, to the civilized dweller in the south of England, are execrable as a rule, and only tolerable when, passing by a succession of gates through large fields, they present an opportunity for cantering along at increased speed. But to the true sportsman they are invaluable, as preserving the battered legs and feet of some old favourite, whose only

remaining consolation, when his gallop is done, is the accumulation of mud, through which it remains for him to reach his stable-door.

But what of the house, which appeared in the columns of the *Pumpington Gazette* under such flattering terms? Boulter's Farm was a straggling, old-fashioned farm-house, of a certain size, with low-pitched rooms and receding fireplaces, now decorated with evergreens; whilst the ceilings rejoiced in rashers of bacon and flint guns. There was a cheerful kitchen, which owned a range sufficient for the requirements of a dozen bachelors. The parlour was small, but snug; just the thing for winter; and the drawing-room was bright and sunny, capable of much display of taste, in the way of trellis-work outside, and hunting-pictures and china within. The bed-rooms, five in number, were convenient in size, on the same floor, and smelling wonderfully of cheese. As far as the house was concerned, such was the impression left

upon the mind of Tom Crackenthorpe and his friend.

"And now for the stabling, Mr. Simcox," said Tom, to that worthy individual, who had appeared at the summons of his wife, and relieved her of the out-door duty. "Now for the stabling. Let me see—eight horses, loose-boxes, &c., and other conveniences."

"Certainly, gentlemen: mind the step. This way, if you please, sir," to Bobby Munster, who was about plunging into a tempting-looking reservoir of liquid-manure. "Round here, sir," said the jolly farmer, as he picked his way through a very opulent-looking farm-yard. "This here's a young 'oss as I bred myself: he's by Belzoni, Young Belzoni, out of a Sir Marinel mare. He's a nice 'oss, very, gentlemen; capital at water and timber; and a Belzoni head all over."

"Well, it is a head all over," said Bobby Munster, who was struck with the size of it, if nothing else. "Now let's look at the stable."

"These *are* the stables, and them's the boxes, on the other side of the yard," said Mr. Simcox, as he waded through some more manure, and opened a series of dark wooden places, which gave evident signs of their occupation by bullocks.

"Airy," said Crackenthorpe, referring to the stables.

"His coat's a little early: had nothin done to him," rejoined the farmer, referring to the four-year-old.

"Plenty of room for the wind," said Munster.

"Never see him blow," said Simcox, still on his hobby.

"They must all come down," continued Crackenthorpe, looking round in a rather disconsolate manner at the dilapidated boxes.

"The best on 'em falls at times," rejoined the farmer; "leastways, if you rides 'em pretty straight."

The inspection of the stables and outbuildings seemed to give less unqualified

approbation than the house; but there still appeared capabilities for improvement if the place could be taken on lease, or if the landlord was disposed to do the repairs. In this mind they returned to the house. Farmer Simcox would not hear of their leaving without a substantial luncheon, which they took at his dinner-hour. Mrs. Simcox was in great form. Her morning, or labouring, dress had been replaced by a most elaborate brown silk, bedaubed with sky-blue rosettes, the whole surmounted by a cap which resembled the Tower of Babel in tiles of Moresque pattern. The farmer's hospitality was sincere, and his ale strong; and he entertained his guests with such marvels of the chase that before their fly was once more at the door Tom Crackenthorpe had made up his mind to set the celebrated firm of Grabhall and Keepitt upon the Agent, to see what could be done towards putting Boulter's Farm in decent order before the ensuing winter. As to Simcox, he had arrived at that comfortable

state of feeling by 3 p.m. that he would do anything to accommodate the gentleman, as to keeping the land or relinquishing it; and even proposed once more to have out the Belzoni colt and let the gentlemen see him jump, though the ground was a bit hard, to be sure.

CHAPTER III.

THE IN-COMING TENANT OF BOULTER'S FARM.

THOMAS CRACKENTHORPE, the hero of our sketch—for he is the fellow we shall eventually marry to some one, after having pulled him through innumerable difficulties by flood and field—was the only son, we may say only child, of a West Indian merchant of large property, who dying, left a lady-like widow with a handsome jointure, and the bulk of his property to his only son, Tom. Having himself had some experience in the ups-and-downs of life, and knowing that the prudence of age is not a characteristic of youth, he so managed matters that Master Thomas should not come into the bulk of his property until he was twenty-six; although a handsome

allowance was to be made for his educational career, and a thousand pounds per annum to be at his own disposal from the age of twenty-one years.

Old Mr. Crackenthorpe having departed this life at no very advanced period of age, from what he called liver, but what everybody else called an overdose of pine-apples and Madeira, the widow returned to Europe. On her way to England she visited the chief capitals, receiving numberless proofs of attachment from the disinterested young aristocrats of the Viennese army, and the democratic soldiers of *la jeune* France, in shape of offers of marriage. She had quite appreciation enough of the sentiments of her admirers, and of her own independent position, to decline, and consequently returned to England unscathed, with her son Tom, at that time between thirteen and fourteen years of age. Tom took more after his father in appearance than after the widow. He was dark instead of fair, and certainly no beauty to look at: but he was a jovial, good-humoured boy, generous

and open-hearted, and a favourite with most people. A short consultation between the widow Crackenthorpe and the trustees decided upon his career. No young gentleman of such promising talents—for money always implies that — should waste his sweetness anywhere but at Eton: and if he could be induced to partake of the springs of that fountain of learning, Christchurch to follow would certainly fit him for the eminent position which all young men of eight or ten thousand pounds a-year are presumed to occupy.

Never was the fitness of things so charmingly illustrated as in Tom's connection with Dr. Hawtrey. Tom hated work; but had quite sufficient early education and natural sharpness to keep his place in the school, and to take his remove when custom expected him to do so. And Eton was not that harsh and severe stepmother, but a true *alma mater*, who looked with a lenient eye on the moderate exertions of the heir to thousands. Not that we mean to infer that, had he been the son of a pauper, whose exist-

ence depended on his industry, she would have troubled herself one iota upon the subject. We do Eton the justice to say, and all other great public schools of this country in the same manner, that for those who wish to work there is more opportunity than falls to the lot of others; and for those who wish to be idle every facility for accomplishing their object is thrown in their way.

Tom early manifested a taste for sport of all kinds. He was fond of a badger; he did not despise a cat; but he dearly loved a fox. He was not great on the river, nor did his name appear in the Eleven at Lord's in those happy days when Greek met Greek, and Eton, Harrow, and Winchester were allowed their annual matches in peace. He was a great authority on terriers, rough and smooth; and though he was at present denied any participation in the pleasures of the chase beyond those of a rat-hunt, he was a great amateur in the butchers' trotting-matches that occasionally came off in the neighbourhood of Slough. He was no mean

pedestrian, and a great patron of the noble art of self-defence. With these varied accomplishments his mother and guardians could not but foresee a brilliant opening at the University of Oxford, and accordingly entered him at Christchurch before he had had time to attain the highest honours of Eton.

Here a more extensive field for his labours presented itself to the genius of Thomas Crackenthorpe. He became an honorary member of the Phœnix, an active one of the Bullingdon Clubs. During the summer he had usually a smartish galloper, which got away with a strong lead, and not unfrequently caught the judge's eye at the finish. He had every conceivable coat, with every conceivable button. As winter approached he made the acquaintance of Mr. Drake, Jem Hills, and Lord Ducie, by exhibiting a sympathy in their pursuits quite touching, and even dangerous to his lengthened sojourn at the University. He was great amongst the Tollitts, and Brambles, and those few re-

maining samples of the old coaching days. He was not so attentive to the College lectures and chapels as to the rendezvous at Charlie Symonds's: and grilled bones and burnt claret found him occupation in his hours of evening relaxation. He was a little short of the refinement of Lord Chinapot in his language and exterior; therefore that young aristocrat voted him a "snob:" whilst the Marquis of Larkingford vowed that Cracks was a capital fellow, and that Chinapot was a confounded ass. It is a law of nature that, when two bodies possessing different degrees of heat come together, the warmer gives out part of its heat to the colder, till the two come to an equality. It is a pity that Chinapot and Crackenthorpe could not have slept together for a night or two, or have been tossed in a blanket: it might have been better for both of them. As it is, we forbear comment; but relate facts as they are. And as a considerable modification will be observed in the character of the one during

the adventures we have undertaken to detail, so we hope Chinapot may have profited by his friction with the world, and appreciate the qualities of those who are moulded in a different form from his own.

Crackenthorpe's career at Oxford ended about the time he was coming of age; a little prematurely perhaps, but not by any means attended with circumstances over which the impartial historian would desire to throw a veil. It is true that he never took a degree: but it is equally true that he never went up for one. Who shall accuse him of incapability? His mother set it down to failing health: poor fellow! he looked as strong and as black as a prison. His guardians, two worthy mercantile millionaires, to a natural desire to visit foreign countries. They say that the name of Crackenthorpe was found in the arm of the pink which decorated the Mercury when the Athenian blacksmith forbade the prosecution of the chase; but that's a calumny, for the lining was torn

out. Others believe him to have been concerned in decorating the oaks of the Dons with red paint; we never heard that he was a limner. The ladies aver that the wife of a high functionary sought him so rabidly for her too susceptible daughter, that he was obliged to abandon the place rather than surrender at discretion. And as Tom has never contradicted the last, though he refuses to confirm the former current reports, we are almost inclined to think that he fell a victim to maternal cupidity. We are the more disposed to lean to this opinion from certain peculiarities with regard to mothers in general, totally irreconcilable with an open and unsuspicious disposition.

Such were the antecedents of the young gentleman who, after a couple of years' hunting and flirting at Pumpington, presented himself as a tenant of Boulter's Farm, in the parish of Lushenham.

CHAPTER IV.

BACK AGAIN TO PUMPINGTON SPA.

Having taken a parting glass with the cheery old farmer, shaken hands with his wife, and lighted a couple of the largest regalias on record, Tom and his friend ascended the Pumpington fly once more. Two things struck them as singular on leaving the village—the postboy had evidently borrowed a saddle for the occasion, as he was now riding post; and he had as evidently partaken very liberally of the farm-house ale. If the parlour eating was sumptuous, there was no deficiency of drink in the kitchen; and fortune, which favours the bold, certainly stood his friend in getting clear of the village. The horses had been well fed upon Mr. Simcox's best old beans, and with their heads towards

home, regarded neither children nor gate-posts.

Tom Crackenthorpe was disposed to think a little over his morning's inspection. The house was clearly a farm-house, and nothing more; it was a "retreat from the fatigues of business or the haunts of pleasure" most undoubtedly; but it might depend very much upon the neighbourhood how far it would suit the retiring propensities of Tom and Bobby Munster. Then the garden was a mere square for the propagation of giant cabbages and winter greens, with a thick round Portugal laurel in the centre, surrounded by a circle of untrimmed box. Three or four standard roses and a bed of marigolds comprised the flower-show. The stables were easily convertible into decent quarters for the Crackenthorpe stud, which with Bobby Munster's two, and the necessity of putting up a friend pretty well through the season, might number some seven or eight hunters and a hack. This was certainly the most lively part of the picture, and reconciled Mr. Crackenthorpe to all

other inconveniences. A house that he could call his own, a bit of land, half-a-dozen loose boxes, and room for a friend, under the influence of the regalia seemed a positive elysium. He had begun to see just the place for his old horse by Harry Hall; his coach picture, a supposed Henderson; and the disposal of the china which had escaped the clumsiness of his scout, or the vagaries of his University friends, in the nooks and corners of the Boulter's Farm drawing-room; and was laying out money and grounds with a prodigal hand, when bump went the fly into the coping-stone of a narrow bridge, shooting the cigars into the opposite seats, and pitching the old gent, who acted as postboy, somewhere between the collar and the horses. Nothing more material happened at present than the waking Bob Munster from his nap, and Crackenthorpe from his reverie. The breeches and tops got back into their old place after an inelegant struggle; and as it is always supposed to be the horses' fault when the carriage runs where it ought not

to run (as whose indeed should it be?), for the next three miles the pace was first-rate. The dust flew and the sun shone, and there could be nothing remarkable in the necessity for watering the horses after a seven-mile ride, three of which had been done at a hand gallop. The two insides therefore made no remonstrance when the fly pulled up at the Green Dragon, and with tottering and uneven steps the boy descended from the pig-skin. He proceeded at once towards the door, mindful of his own necessities, and not of his fare.

"Now then, stupid, open the door," said Mr. Munster.

"Lor' bless me, if I ain't forgotten you gents. Now then, sir, lean upon me!"

"Lean upon you, you old idiot!" replied Bob. "Why, you're drunk; very drunk. Look at him, Tom."

And here I regret to say Mr. Tom Crackenthorpe indulged in some very unseemly merriment at the expense of his driver. Age should always be respected, and the

boy might have been the father of either of them.

After waiting some ten minutes, by which time the chaise had recovered its equilibrium, the cattle their wind, and Bob Munster his spirits, the postboy, more tipsy than ever, presented himself with a short clay pipe, and his whip under his arm.

"Now, sir, if you please," said he, with an amount of politeness which nearly overbalanced him, "if you're a goin' inside, I'm a goin' outside."

"Yes; but not with that pipe," said Mr. Crackenthorpe; "so out with it at once, and don't stand there like a fool. Now get on your horse," as he saw the offensive clay presented to the sympathising ostler, "and mind you don't break your neck!"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha—my neck! well, that's capital, capital to be sure," said the boy, as he clambered once more on to his horse, and started with a lurch that nearly sent him off again.

"What do you think of the house, Bobby?"

"I've seen a man very drunk in a very much smaller one."

"No doubt; and will again, when you get back to the Temple. But do you think it would suit us?"

"That depends entirely upon circumstances—not mine, you know, Tom, for I havn't any money at all. But if you like to take it, I'll come with you, and bring the horses, and have all things in common; and then you know I——"

"Oh! never mind about that; we'll settle that afterwards. I think I'd better go up to town, and see Grabhall and Keepitt, before I go to Scotland. We might get in next season, if we did the stables, and rough it."

"You'd bring the claret and champagne, I suppose, and I'd find the cook; or, stay, you take the cook, and I'll get the wine," said Bobby, brightening and puffing out a cloud of Tom Crackenthorpe's tobacco-smoke. "You might find the cigars, too,

if you think the wine's too much for me."

"I don't care which arrangement you make."

"Well, you're the ready-money bird, and the cook will want his wages. I must keep my ready-money for the pikes and the railway—everything else goes on tick."

"Excepting that clock of Dent's, which I——. Good heavens! what's become of the postboy?"

True enough he was gone; the horses had reduced themselves to a foot's pace, and, as the box of the fly was not easy to see through, Tom had only just missed their drunken conductor.

"Jump out, Bobby, on your side."

"I'd rather jump out on my feet," said Bob; and, opening the door, he let himself out and stopped the horses, who seemed noways loth. It was quite clear what had happened to their driver. About fifty yards back, in the middle of the road, sat the late occupant of the saddle; he was bolt upright, as far as a figure like his could

be, and was roaring to an imaginary somebody to stop his horses. Of any further exertion he was quite incapable; nor did he seem the least inclined to attempt it. Upon endeavouring to raise him from the ground, however, which was no light task, they perceived, what had not been apparent before, that he was deformed—one shoulder was higher than the other, and, as he now sat on the ground, showed itself with extraordinary prominence.

"How odd!" said Tom; "I never saw that before. Now, then, are you going to get up, or to stay here all the evening?"

"All the evening," said the drunken vagabond.

At that moment there came by a respectably-dressed man, who good-naturedly volunteered to assist.

"Bless me, poor fellow!" said he, upon closer examination, "he's put his shoulder out."

"Has he really?" said Bobby Munster.

"Undoubtedly."

"Then let's put it in for him," said the other.

And, without more ado, Crackenthorpe and Munster on one side and the good-natured Samaritan on the other set to work to pull his shoulder in again. I've heard of washing a nigger white, but it would be an easy task compared to that they had undertaken. Albeit, two of the three roared with laughter, whilst the drunken victim struggled in vain against their tender solicitude.

"Wa-a-as th' matter?" inquired he.

"Your shoulder's out, you old fool; sit still, or you'll have it in a terrible state."

"Born-n-n so-o-o," murmured the sufferer.

"What does he say?" roared Bob. "Tough old cock it is; hang'd if I can move it! Now, then, once more; a real good one; I hear it giving."

And, applying a good vigorous pull on both sides, crack went the coat up the middle of the back, and down went the vigorous bone-setters on both sides.

"Tell yer, I was born so," again roared the drunken postboy.

"Good gwacious," said the terrified

stranger, "he says he was born so; what a singular mistake! But what are we to do with him, gentlemen? We can't leave him in the road in this state, and there's no house within miles, that I know of."

"Can you ride, Tom? because if not we must walk. How many miles is it to Pumpington?"

"Five miles; rather better. Unfortunately there's no public near."

"Put him inside," said Tom Crackenthorpe; "I'll ride; it's the only thing to be done. Can we give you a lift?"

"No thank you; I'd just as soon walk."

"Well, Munster, old fellow, you get upon the box, unless you like to go inside with the boy." Here, however, it occurred to Tom Crackenthorpe that he couldn't ride in trousers, excepting at the expense of his right leg.

"Take his boots off," said Bob, who was usually pretty fertile in expedients. "Too short, by Jove! so they are. Give us a knife."

"No, no, Bob; they'll fit you. You

ride, and I'll go on the box. Now, then, in with him, and pull up the shutters."

After some little altercation, this seemed to be as good an arrangement as could be arrived at under the circumstances; and away they went for Pumpington.

To any person who has not tried it, the process of riding a tired post-horse in a fly may appear easy and pleasant enough. Walking, which I admit I dislike (and I have tried both), is far preferable. Of course the pleasure is not enhanced by the peculiarity of an ordinary morning dress; and, though the company of your nearest friend on the box adds something to your moral courage, a drunken postboy inside, who may become unruly at any moment, counterbalances in some degree the enjoyment.

On the present occasion everything went well. As they approached the Spa, and ladies and gentlemen began to appear—some returning from their afternoon ride, and others in search of health by a post-prandial canter—curiosity was awakened by

the glossy appearance of the postilion's hat, and his unusually neat collars and appurtenances. The valet's aristocratic get-up was quite in keeping with the ordinary features of that hard-working, ill-paid class of persons, as he lounged on the box, smoking a cigar, with his hat drawn over his eyes in a half-somnolent state. It was thought possible that, in nearing the town, some outstanding public might furnish a rider; and, exchange being no robbery, might accept of the invalid inside as a deposit. Unfortunately no such chance offered; and, with a decision well worthy of himself and the comparative security of his position, Tom Crackenthorpe determined upon proceeding at once to 'The George,' the great hotel of the town, the temporary residence of himself and his friends, and the head-quarters of the aristocracy of Pumpington. This was a bold step of Master Tom; but, I suppose, he knew his licence and its extent nearly as well as he was known.

"Now, then, Bobby, push on, it will soon

be over; keep your head down, and turn up the tails of your coat: nobody here ever saw you in a short jacket," said he to Munster, who showed symptoms of pulling up to remonstrate. "You're not very unlike the boy, now that we've put his shoulder in, I should think."

Somehow or other they were already unconsciously in the little suburbs of the town, and it seemed almost easier to go on than to stop; the latter undertaking only courted observation. At this moment the draught horse nearly came down on his head; Bobby pulled him together, and, with three or four vigorous applications of the whip, set him going again in first-rate form.

"Keep some of that to go up the Parade with, Robert," said Tom, roaring with laughter, and quite quit of his former bashfulness.

To do Munster justice, nothing abashed *him*, and he played away busily at the worn-out cattle, as he dashed over the little bridge at the bottom of the Parade. The jerks and the stones had had their effect,

too, upon the inside passenger, who, upon an acceleration of pace, had been shaken into a sort of consciousness, and, though not recollecting much of the circumstances of the ride, detected, by a sort of instinct, the inside of his master's fly. He was just able to let down the shutters, and just drunk enough to put his bootless legs through the one window, whilst his torn coat and listless arm hung outside of the other. This added greatly to the general effect, and would have been appreciated by Tom Crackenthorpe, had he only been conscious of the great addition this made to the otherwise unostentatious display.

"Now, Bob, put on the steam; here comes Clara Jones and the old lady."

And, true enough, in crinoline of most ample dimensions, and a love of a pork-pie, under the convoy of a wide-spreading silk and a Solferino parasol, came the young lady of Robert Munster's heart. I do not think Bob was capable of a real first-class passion, but he was sufficiently fond of himself to know that a ridiculous position

does not increase your chance of success with your mistress. For my part, I believe a woman can forgive anything but that. As Clara swept past, however, Bob ventured one look, and then he saw the bootless legs well out of the window, as helpless and disorderly as legs could be.

"Dash it, Cracks; look at the window!" said Bob. "And here comes old General Bulrush and the girls; shall we stop, or turn round?"

"Turn round? no; dash it! sit down on your horse, and powder along. Confound the fellow! he looks like a corpse, with those cursed legs of his hanging out of the window. Mind you don't injure the body as you go round the corner!"

General Bulrush and the ladies all stopped to have a look at the novel effect, and recognised the driver, though they had no idea who the inside might be. "Disgraceful!" said he; "Shocking!" said Emily; "Horrible!" said Charlotte; "Lor', dear," said Miss Marian, who was very fond of

Tom; "perhaps he's dead, and they can't help bringing him home, you know."

As this was said aloud, it didn't take long to reach the bottom of the Parade, where Mrs. Sparkes and her daughters, old Bumfoozle and his niece, and that cheerful little body Miss Bridget Macdawdell, were just turning out of the gardens.

"Dead? bless me!" said Miss Bridget; "how shocking!"

"Yes, my dear, quite dead," said Mrs. Jones, who joined her very opportunely; "I saw his legs, and Clara was so shocked she has scarcely recovered it." *Fama crescit eundo.* Very true.

The following morning two middle-aged ladies—there are no old women at Pumpington, and *middle*-aged means just half-way between fifty and a hundred—met at the Pump-room.

"Very serious case this, ma'am, I fear. I have just met Mr. Sparkes, the lawyer on his way to see Mr. Crackenthorpe on particular business; he says he believes he will leave the country. It's only man-

slaughter; but it's a very serious case. And the poor man leaves a family behind."

"But you don't mean to say that he's dead, Mrs. Markby? Dear, dear! what will poor Marian Bulrush do?"

"Well, I don't know; but poor Clara Jones is quite beside herself." Here the old lady, who had only one eye, squinted horribly.

"And how did it happen, Mrs. Markby?"

"Well, ma'am, I don't rightly know; but let us hope accidentally. There's no doubt at all that somehow or other Mr. Crackenthorpe and Mr. Munster have killed a post-boy."

CHAPTER V.

A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

Old Sparkes was the thriving lawyer of Pumpington. He knew everybody, and everybody's business; and he had scraped together a very nice little property, which would be divided between his children, two boys and three girls, at his death. Not that he thought of dying yet, by any means. A man who is eternally engaged in conveying property from others to himself, in drawing marriage contracts, making wills, and managing estates, has no time to die. The world of Pumpington would have stood still without Old Sparkes. Then, he was a bit of a sportsman; that is, he kept two horses, wore stiff coloured chokers well starched, long straight-cut waistcoats, tight trousers, and single-buttoned straps:

his boots were highly polished, and his gloves of the most elaborate and imperishable doeskin. He collected the subscription for the county hounds, was honorary secretary to the Pumpington Hunt Club, and always took the vice-chair at the sporting meetings, which were considered necessary for the discussion of the haunch, and the business in the autumn and spring of every year. He was great at the Spa; and was not in the habit of being contradicted, excepting at home. He was the greatest man in the town, and his wife was a greater. Indeed, Mrs. Sparkes might have said, with the popular Mr. Buckstone, "My father was the strongest man in all Kentucky, and I walloped my father."

When Tom and his friend had safely deposited the drunken postboy in the hands of the ostler, by whom he was immediately consigned to some clean straw in the stable in company with a kicking mare and a broken-winded fly-horse, they proceeded to dinner in the coffee-room. It then occurred to them that, before completing any arrange-

ment in connection with Boulter's Farm, they might save some time, and not a little money, by paying a visit, a friendly visit, to Lawyer Sparkes. It is but justice to Mrs. Sparkes to say that she was hospitality itself — a personification of the goddess Vesta, in *glacé* silks and a handsome cap; and though she has been known to turn her back and close her doors upon fighting O'Brien of the 41st Cuirassiers, it was not till he had enjoyed four seasons of unexampled encouragement on her part, and was then discovered to have only a hundred a-year besides his pay, and to be irretrievably involved. Tom Crackenthorpe and Bobby Munster were only in their second season; and the presumed resources of the former, and a sort of splendid mystery connected with a fine old property in Connemara which attached to the latter, quite absolved them from the suspicion of any such catastrophe. The well-greased portals opened at their first application to the door-bell; and Mrs. Sparkes's own man, well-tutored in a Pumpington detrimental or

the reverse, announced, with well-founded confidence, Mr. Crackenthorpe and Mr. Munster.

"Now, this is kind of you; this is what Sparkes does so enjoy"—and I always know when the mistress is master, by this wanton use of his name—"he will be so pleased: Amelia dear, go and tell your father. Ah! Mr. Munster, you know what the demand upon the time of professional men must be;" and here she leered at Bob, as if he were an embryo Lord Chancellor.

"I do, indeed, Mrs. Sparkes; but I couldn't resist the pleasure of accompanying Mr. Crackenthorpe for an hour, if you will excuse so unceremonious a visit. I wish we could adopt generally in this country the comfortable custom of Paris."

"Ah! dear delightful Paris! I remember when Sparkes and I were—;" but here Amelia returned with Old Sparkes, who had been paying his professional visit to some '20 port, and had just been roused from a nap in the dining-room, where he

had forgotten to shake out the crumbs from his napkin before he put it over his head in lieu of a nightcap. The necessity of greeting the old boy broke off Mrs. Sparkes's experiences of Paris life; and two more daughters entering the room, and a brother, a newer edition only of Sparkes *père*, the conversation became general.

"Been out to look at the young hounds yet, Mr. Crackenthorpe? some capital entries!"

"Not yet. I can't get up," said Tom.

"But you must get up. Just what we want: you young men must take an interest in the thing."

"My dear Sparkes, you forget," said the lady; and he had certainly forgotten the presence of his wife; "young men like Mr. Crackenthorpe and Mr. Munster live for something more than those nasty dogs."

They certainly did: for everything else, from a bull-bait to a sham-fight, which could add to their earthly enjoyment.

"I hardly know," said Tom, "whether we shall be here another winter. Munster

talks of setting up for a country gentleman. I'm afraid he has been disappointed in love."

"Oh, quite impossible!" said the lady, who wished he'd try them.

"Quite impossible!" said Sparkes, who foresaw the loss of a subscription: and this time she didn't contradict him.

"And where are you going to?" said Amelia, with a long-drawn sigh.

"Not a great way from here," sighed Bob, *sotto voce*; "so we should still run over occasionally."

"Dear me! I thought you might be going to that horrid Ireland."

"We heard of a place at Lushenham that would suit us just for the winter months, if it could be had on lease, and put into tenantable repair." Tom seemed to think the sooner the announcement was made the better, that the ladies might get over it.

"Lushenham, Lushenham! I know all about Lushenham," said Lawyer Sparkes, who smelt a job, if he could but get it:

and he thought, if they were to go, he might as well profit by the move.

"Do you really? how fortunate! we want to know all about it."

"Bless you, Mr. Crackenthorpe! I know all about it. I'll settle it for you in a day or two. Send over my clerk Jobson—shrewd fellow, Jobson; have all the particulars in no time. What's the name of the property?" said he, moving to a writing-table, and checking off the heads on a sheet of paper. "Boulter's Farm?—do it all for friends like you." Judging by his friends, it would have been curious to know what he did for his enemies. "Close to the church?—delightfully convenient: just pay for the stamps, you know, a mere trifle."

"But," began Bob, who was not of so easy a temperament as Tom Crackenthorpe, "we have scarcely—"

"Don't say a word: we'll have all the information for you by the day after to-morrow. Thursday—yes, say Thursday. Come in and take your dinner, and we'll

talk the matter over. Half-past six, punctually; and now, Amelia, give us a little music. Let's have that fine old glee, 'A Southerly Wind:' you three girls can sing it; and George and I will join in. Come, Mr. Munster, I know you sing. I've heard you sing 'Little Billee;' charming song, quite in the old ballad style." And here Mr. Sparkes broke up the conference. It was clear nothing could save them but the sudden death of the eminent Jobson.

By the time of the evening muffin-bell of the next day, the whole of Pumpington was made aware of the intended or proposed removal of two of its more familiar stars. The women, as a body, were inconsolable: the old ones, because new causes of attraction for their muffin struggles had to be sought out; and then it was very doubtful whether such truly successful ones as Tom Crackenthorpe and Bob Munster were to be lightly met with: the young ones, because, if Tom was not altogether a lady's man, he was not averse to a good honest flirtation, where neither could do

the other material damage, and where, if he kept off some, he brought others on; and because Bobby Munster, since the days of old Elliston, was, without any exception, the best gentleman lover (not to be in earnest) that had been seen in Pumpington. None of the people are in earnest in anything at the Spa, except the old—I mean the middle-aged—ladies, and the swindlers; there's no reality at all about the youngsters: so that the really good make-believes become very valuable. The male sex, to a man, were sorry to lose such admirable pickings as they got at the Crackenthorpe table, billiard and otherwise; for he was as unsuspicious and liberal as a bankrupt layer of the odds on a great event: and though Bobby was much too wary a gentleman to be caught, and rather resembled the wolf than the lamb, his company was always worth the money to those who were pleased to act Amphitryon. He rather, indeed, resembled the fox, of which that gentleman is said to have gone in chase: the dog and the fox were both so clever,

that Jupiter, not to prolong the contest, turned them into stone. I think some of the old hands had their suspicions as to whether this fox was so well worth skinning. Ready-money Bob, as he was called at Ch. Ch., had great expectations, as you or I may have, or anybody else: but the women do jump so to conclusions!

The trading population was *au désespoir*. Tom Crackenthorpe's liberality had extended to four times his income; and the grand-seigneur airs of Bobby Munster stood for an unknown quantity—*Omne ignotum pro magnifico*. They were a great loss in their way. For Tom always paid when he could; and Bobby was equally honest, by assuring that he never should be able to pay for anything. "Nice thing in bracelets, Mr. Munster," said Argent the jeweller; "and here's a charming watch—age of the moon, day of the month and week, and probable state of the weather; very cheap!" "Very nice, indeed; but I've no money." "O that don't signify, sir; ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Argent.

"You'll want it some day, you know." "We'll take our chance about that, sir." "Well," said Bob, "I'll take the bracelet; but I shall never be able to pay." "O yes, you will, sir; you'd better take the watch too; it's very cheap; only twelve-ten." "Then good morning, Argent. I'll be hanged, Tom, if that fellow don't deserve to suffer: he won't believe an honest man, he's dealt so long with rogues."

Mr. Jobson enjoyed his drive to Lushenham exceedingly. His driver did not enjoy the hospitality of Farmer Simcox, but got the stomach-ache at the village-public. The consequence was, a safe and satisfactory return. Of course he found out nothing but the address of the London agent. He might have saved himself the journey by looking in the 'County Gazette,' where Crackenthorpe had seen it. It is not impossible that he knew it already. However, that night's post carried off an official communication from Messrs. Sparkes and Dribble, which was satisfactorily answered in course of post. The property could be

had on lease—seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years, with the refusal, at so much, if it should be sold; the owner to make such repairs and alterations as should be agreed upon, and the tenant to keep it in habitable condition; fixtures for consideration. Land or not at the tenant's option, and timber at a valuation. And as Old Sparkes read the letter, he saw a very pretty stroke of business; unless, as his wife said, one of the ingoing tenants should happen to propose, and then Sparkes must allow for it in the bill.

Thursday came, and half-past six with it. And five minutes later came Crackenthorpe and Munster. They had said very little about Lushenham to their friends, and not much to each other, determined to wait the intelligence which Lawyer Sparkes was collecting for them.

"Now, Mr. Crackenthorpe, will you take Mrs. Sparkes? Mr. Munster, my daughter Amelia; and you, Jemima, must put up with your father till you can get some one better. Lead the way, Mr. Crackenthorpe; we'll reverse the order of things to-day."

The dinner was excellent; Sparkes was in good spirits; a shade of interesting sadness sat upon Amelia, characteristic of the melancholy occasion. Munster looked once or twice at his neighbour, and thought she was a very good-looking girl, considering the length of her nose. Amelia was only wondering who would replace Bobby; and whether he would really swallow the bait, or only dance round it. As to hanging on with a man who lived twenty miles distant, and who only came over occasionally, the thing was simply ridiculous. Altogether the party enjoyed itself exceedingly. The dinner, we said, was good. Three or four glasses of champagne each gave a little company-look to an otherwise family circle; for Sparkes was no niggard of good things, and made others pay for them; and when the ladies retired, which they did in good time, one bottle of the '20 port, and as much '44 claret as you liked, was afterwards at your service. Men whom he insulted by his charges, he conciliated by his wine. The business was not long in transacting.

The lawyer placed in brief detail before his compulsory clients the intelligence we have already given the reader; and, before many minutes, had quite supplanted Messrs. Grabhall and Keepitt.

"You must have it; Jobson says 'it's the very thing:' shrewd fellow, Jobson; and I'll do the rest of it; only leave it to me, as a friend."

"*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*," thought Munster.

"Do you know anything of the neighbourhood?"

"Bless you, yes—every man, woman, and child; that is, every man, woman, and child that ought to be known. There's Partington, the vicar—rather a psalm-singer—and his wife and two daughters. I hope you are not susceptible! or she'll certainly make you marry one a-piece. It's an unfortunate number; with three, four, or six, now, you might have had a chance."

Crackenthorpe laughed, and thought they had plenty of experience at Pumpington. What did Mr. Sparkes think of a ball?—

they talked of giving one before leaving. They couldn't ask the ladies to a dinner. Of course the ladies would be charmed. He, for his part, was not much of a man for balls; but the first consideration was the ladies.

"What, no more claret? just one more bottle: rather not? Well, then, suppose we join them?"

Sparkes had done his duty: it was Mrs. Sparkes's turn now.

CHAPTER VI.

PREPARATIONS FOR SLAUGHTER.

Mrs. Sparkes was delighted at the suggestion of a bachelors' ball. What amiable female, with a handsome turban and three unmarried daughters, is not? Balls were the delight of her soul: and bachelors understood that sort of thing so well. The good woman kindly undertook to do the touting for Tom, and ascertain what success he was likely to meet with amongst the mothers and daughters of Pumpington Spa. There certainly could not be much doubt on her mind that, if a ball were given and a supper were spread, there would be plenty to dance at the one and eat at the other. In three days' time she announced to Tom Crackenthorpe that he had nothing to do but to fix his day and send out his cards,

as far as the Spa was concerned: and she numbered-up, on her fingers, so many certain acceptances that she should have been a perfect Briareus to get them all in. There was herself, and the Joneses, and the Bulrushes, who had been sadly shocked at the murder of the postboy, but, discovering it to be only manslaughter, had waived the point in favour of such a very excellent young man. The reverend the vicar must decline for himself and Mrs. Primrose, having no daughters; but he would send his curate, who was bound to do the dancing for both, and was a very nice young man. too. General Hazy had promised to come, with his one-eyed sister and their only daughter. Sir MacShanus O'Toole and the Misses O'Toole would be "delighted;" and Barclay of Dingle Bogie, who was always addressed as "Bogie," according to the old Gaelic fashion, after his estate, "wadna say nay to sic innocent festeevities." The Scotchman, too, had a lovely daughter, who lost no opportunity of exhibiting the family cairngorm—now on her head, now on her

neck, occasionally on her hand before, and anon on her hand behind. To sum up all in one word, as a guarantee for the respectability of the whole affair, the Honourable Biddy Racoon, an irreproachable young woman of fifty, had promised to give her countenance, if her brother, Lord Kangaroo, would escort her. Kangaroo was not fond of going out after dinner, but on an occasion like that she thought he might be persuaded to strain a point. The baron was fond of his rubber as well as of his sister, and would rather have lost the latter than the former at any time.

This being the case, there seemed little to do but to order the fiddlers and supper at once. Both were to be of the first quality. Pumpington has always been famous for its "tanz-musik:" and, to do them justice, the young couples kept their hands in pretty well. What with the Orthopœdic Hospital Ball, and the Race Ball, and the Hunt Ball, and the quarterly assemblies, and the *hebdomadal thé dansante*, as a muffin-struggle and a waltz was politely called, the worshippers of Terpsichore were

not idle at Pumpington. But, then, there was this difference: at each of these a mother and three daughters were valued at two guineas the lot; now they were invaluable, and somebody else was going to pay the piper. I regret to have to record this vulgar sentiment; but those who know the Spa, and love truth, will forgive me. It was quite clear that this would be the ball of the season. There were to be no cleaned gloves nor soiled satin slippers; and the least that could be done to the tulle dresses was a new slip of more than usually ample folds. All the milliners in the place were put in requisition at once; and Mrs. Jones and the "Bogie's" daughter struggled violently for the last journeyman workwoman in the place. She fell to the lot of Mrs. Jones, by the ill-timed economy of Dingle Bogie, who was driven into the arms of Madame Grizette, of South Molton Street, and mulcted in the penalty of a five-pound note, which carried off one month's winnings at the club.

"Well, Clara dear," said Marian Bulrush

to her charming friend, "shall you wear your white dress, looped up with the pink roses? I hope you will; it is so becoming."

Marian had declared at home, and it was generally agreed, that nothing suited Clara so well as blue; and that the white and pink was the very acmè of vulgarity.

"Of course I shall," said Clara; "I can't afford any more new dresses this season."

Mrs. Hemstitch was at that moment employed, for life or death, upon a charming pale-blue silk, which had arrived from town only the day before.

"What a lovely wreath you had on at Mrs. Markby's on Thursday, Amelia!" said Fanny Grizzell to Miss Sparkes. "I never saw you look so well. Where did you get it?"

"Papa bought it for me at Michel's the last time he was in town. I'm so glad you admire it," said Amelia, who had taken it off after the night in question, vowing that nothing short of utter bankruptcy should ever induce her to decorate her auburn locks with scarlet japonicas again; and had just

secured the most exquisite bunch of corn-flowers and poppies that could possibly be conceived. In fact, if ever the young ladies of Pumpington had been bent upon astonishing their best friends by a pleasant surprise or two, it was to be on the night of the Crackenthorpe ball.

It must not be supposed that the gentlemen were idle in the mean time. What with new boots, or new patent varnish for the old ones; what with new cuffing and collaring the old coats, which were getting towards the end of their season, and the silk-facings, required on this popular occasion, the local schneiders were kept in full employ. I presume, that no one ventured upon building a coat or trousers at Pumpington. Some of the very young men were nibbling at some waistcoat patterns; if not so new as they might be, loud enough for anything. Most of them had decided upon a bouquet from the provincial Covent Garden, or from the floriculturist at the bottom of the Parade; for these amiable young men all affected, or felt, the tender passion

more or less, and found a language in flowers, which they took care to find nowhere else. When the notes of invitation were sent out, too, it was astonishing how anxious everybody was to let Tom or his friend Bobby see that they were at the Spa. They had both become exceedingly popular with the men, as well as the women; and the bitterest of their rivals were suddenly converted into their warmest admirers. Tom Crackenthorpe was really a very good fellow on the whole; but it was astonishing how little he was appreciated by the men after the women had taken him up. Bobby Munster's vagaries were so irreconcilable with what are called serious intentions, that he was regarded in a less suspicious light. There are very few men who achieve greatness in both lines.

"Look at that ass Crackenthorpe spooning Lydia Slowcome," said young Butterton to his friend Jack Halston, who had often tried the same game in the same quarter ineffectually; "did you ever see such hoofs in your life?"

Butterton was proud of his feet.

"Tom's not half a bad fellow," replied Jack, who was not over partial to Butterton; "he always 'parts' like a man, and that's something in this wicked world. You know you're jealous of him, Butty."

"Jealous of Cracks! come, that's rather too good," replies Butty, looking down at his patent leathers, and wondering when they were likely to be paid for. "And here comes Munster, making a fool of little Clara Jones. What an idiot old mother Jones must be to stand that sort of thing!"

"I rather think it's Clara that's making a fool of him," said Jack Halston, who had an incipient passion for Clara himself, with which nothing but whisky-and-water and chicken-hazard interfered. "Well, Lushington, how are you? Look at Munster."

"Munster! where is he? I must say how-d'ye-do to him; I haven't seen him this age."

Lushington had not had an "at home," or whatever the two bachelors called their notes of invitation, and thought it desirable just now to forget his private jealousies in

his zeal for the public service. Lushington felt that no ball could really be perfect without him.

"So I hear you and Crackenthorpe are going to leave the Spa this season. 'Pon my honour, I'm deuced sorry."

"You ought to be very glad," said Bobby.

"I don't exactly see that," rejoined Lushington, with one of his blandest smiles. "Pumpington won't look like the same place without you two fellows."

"You'll have it all to yourself, you know, when we're gone," said Munster, with an easy *nonchalance* which almost shut up Lushington; who, however, returned once more to the charge, wondering whether he hadn't better try Crackenthorpe. "I suppose we shall see you at the Giles's to-morrow—everybody's going. I delight in dancing, though the rooms are small. There's nothing, after all, like a good big room, with plenty of light, and a good after-supper dance. I like it almost as much as hunting."

"In some respects it's less dangerous. Good-bye! I am going for a ride with the Sparkeses."

And Bobby Munster had turned the corner before Lushington had quite recovered from the vigour of his own assault.

It is almost needless to observe that Crackenthorpe and his friend were in the mean time immersed in anxieties rather than business. There was nothing very formidable in giving orders; but when it comes to seeing how they are executed, for the criticism of other people, the hardiest philosopher must have his moments of doubt. Would the lighting be good? the band remain sober? and the champagne last out? Would the supper be standing up, or sitting down? and were the oysters and porter in the little back-room for particular friends, who always, like oysters, are certain to arrive on the day? Then the invitations. If the Podgers were asked —and old Podgers was not a bad fellow for a retired sugar-baker—what was to be done about the Hodgkinsons? They would

be furious, if left out. There was the mayor, too, a retired tinman, who gave good dinners, and many of them - he must be invited. Wouldn't the aldermen expect cards too? "No," said Bobby; "ask the mayor, and let him bring his corporation with him—he's well able to do so." Jobson had a deadly feud with Mr. Bates; Jobson must be asked, and Julia Bates was the prettiest girl in the county. Then there was the 365th Regiment Connaught Fire-eaters, who must be asked to a man, as the colonel was constantly driving into Pumpington from the barracks, and had given a ten-pound note to the Covers. Every individual sub would have considered himself personally insulted by neglect of summons. Gorsehamptonshire was a very stronghold of eligible young men, who were ready to go anywhere, do anything, or lay any amount of odds. Many of Tom's present friends were members of the Gorsehamptonshire Hunt; and if he meant to go to Lushenham, he might have many more. Lord Cropperton was an M.F.H., an earl

(that would gladden all hearts) with an undiminished rent-roll, a most uncompromising foxhunter, a Ch. Ch. friend of Crackenthorpe's, and a very good fellow, who was sure to do justice to the oysters and porter. There is no doubt that Ned Bingham would have felt more at home crossing the Coplow, damaging the turnip-tops, at the 'Bells' at Putney, or delivering the upper-cut, than in La Poule or the Polka Mazourka. But Ned was second to none in Tom's estimation; and he must be persuaded to invest in a pair of lemon-coloured kids and some "Vernis de Paris" on an occasion like the present. In his way, too, he was a lion, who preferred riding up and down stairs to the ordinary method of mounting and descending the "escalier" of his hotel, after jumping his horse over the sideboard or the plate-warmer, and would be expected to escort his sisters, two of the prettiest girls on that side of the country. In fine, after running their eye over a list of about two hundred people,

some of whom were useful, some ornamental, some necessary, and some politic additions to the success of the ball, both Tom and Bobby got so utterly confused that they allowed matters to take their chance, and proposed a day or two in London to recruit their spirits after such unwonted labours.

"We'll just go up to town," said Crackenthorpe, "have a quiet dinner or two, and see if there's anything else wanting."

"We'll just go to a theatre or two," said Bobby Munster, "and make a night of it; and I'll see if I can't draw the Governor for a hundred. I haven't seen him since the last rent-day at Connemara."

It occurred to Tom, however, just before starting, that the patronage of a lady of his own family might not be unadvisable. His mother was at Torquay, and, as by no means an ineligible person to represent the family in such a scene, he sat down and wrote the following pleasant little note to her:—

"Pumpington, Aug. 19.

"My dear Mother,

"This is a very nice quiet place for recruiting the purse and the spirits, after the dust and heat of Rotten Row and the mudlarks and whitebait dinners of Greenwich. Besides which, having been here for two or three years consecutively, I feel more at home than on the coast. We are a very pleasant set here. Your old acquaintance, Munster, came down with me, as he is very hard up, and wants to live quietly. He has only two horses to begin the season, so I must do what I can to give him a mount or two. The people here never seem to change. The Sparkeses are just the same as when you knew them the season before last: the young ladies are very civil, and Amelia and Munster as thick as thieves. If he does not take care he will be caught some fine day. Clara Jones is making fierce love to Jack Halston, who has just had some money left him, though I don't think she cares about him. And Mrs. Jones has been to Doctors' Commons in search of my poor father's will. It cost her several shillings, and she did not hit upon it at last. Should you like Marian Bulrush for a daughter-in-law? The General pretends to be shocked at the drunken postboy; but Marian and her mother don't seem to think anything of it. At least I've had two

dreadful teas and a family dinner since, with some severe pumping about Halston's legacy, which has varied from thirty-five to ten thousand. It is really four, and will last him about a twelvemonth. I have just taken, or am about taking, a cottage at Lushenham, a village on the borders of Gorse-hamptonshire. Old Sparkes has managed it for me, as a friend. Munster says that means at twice the usual expense, which is all he knows of law at present. I don't think Sparkes would like to shock either of us at this moment: he is said to have great filial affection. The O'Tooles make a great push for the Cropperton estates; but his Lordship is much too wide awake to be taken alive by the Galway brogue; and even the big brother, with an explanation of his intentions, didn't move him. Bingham takes great care of him, and, when he is here, makes us all go to church on Sundays. If you had a house here you might ask Bingham, and, just as a companion to yourself, one of his sisters: they are quiet sort of people; not bad-looking. Bingham is older than ever. He is not a lady's man; but I remember he used to talk to you more than to most people.

"But what I wrote to you for particularly was to ask a favour. As the people here, especially the women, have been very civil to us, Bob and I have arranged to give a ball on the 29th. Of

course, a good many are away in the Highlands and at the sea-side. However, we shall muster pretty strong; and it would give me so much pleasure if you would let me take rooms here for you for a month, or a shorter time if you wish it. You look rather young for the place; but as you *are* my mother, that won't signify. If you will just receive the company, you can dance as much as you like afterwards. Now, do come, my dear mother, and bring the most becoming dress you have with you.

"Believe me your affectionate son,

"THOMAS CLIVE CRACKENTHORPE."

Of course he sealed it; and, of course, he directed it; and, as a natural consequence, it went to the post. A few hours after Tom and Munster had gone to town.

CHAPTER VII.

IN LONDON.

London is not a gay place at the latter end of August; at least, it requires a remarkably good digestion to make it so. I say a good digestion, for I hold that to be the *summum bonum*; and the inventor of light dinners and forty-four claret, next to the man who first dreamt of sleep, is the greatest benefactor mankind has seen. Crackenthorpe and Munster were, as yet, pretty well off for this; but even that will not fill the shady side of Bond Street, or people Brookes's and White's, with the forms that have been. Still, it has its charms. To the philosopher it presents a charming desert, full of subjects of contemplation, and within a shilling fare of that city which is always in season. To the *blasé* man of

pleasure, tired of that eternal grousing, and sick of the names of Lancaster and Purday, it is a retirement as noiseless as Père la Chaise, and much more suggestive of eternal quiet. Every house in the aristocratic Faubourg looks like a tenantless tomb—a pyramid of the eighteenth or nineteenth century. The water-carts are at Margate, the rates and taxes at Brighton, and our creditors are off to the Highlands. Alcibiades, Julius Cæsar, or Sheridan might walk the street with impunity. Even Solomon himself forgets to put his little writ or threat in execution.

There was a time when mohawks were alive: not so very long ago neither: when peaceful citizens, like old Brabantio, were roused from their slumbers by a strange knocking; when policemen's heads went starring it, and bells, door-knockers, scrapers, and watchmen's rattles furnished half the bachelors' rooms in London. An attempt was even made upon the golden emblem of the Brasenose College gates; but unsuccessfully. No more, however, are the echoes

of the paving-stones waked to the cry of "Watch"—as if any one could do aught else—and the ghost of Sir Richard Birnie sleeps peacefully in its shroud.

It did not take long for Crackenthorpe and his friend to see what there was to be seen at the theatres. The legitimate drama was on its wane. Fechter had not appeared, and Charles Kean had not yet murdered the nephew and uncle together. There was, of course, a sensation drama at the Adelphi, founded on the 'Newgate Calendar,' and one of the French immoralities, to be seen somewhere or other. Sadler's Wells, though I have not an idea where that is, was open; and the Surrey was not yet being whitewashed, nor its manager: still that does not last for ever; and after a week's quiet dining, in a club-room all to themselves, with half-a-dozen waiters, and the run of the old novels and sofas in the drawing-room, they were proposing to return, preparatory to the doings at Pumpington. Bobby was still without his hundred pounds; and as the

old gentleman was in town, dancing attendance upon the Secretary for Ireland, in the hope of getting something, he did not like to let the opportunity slip. One dinner—purely a business dinner, and not one of pleasure, Munster observed—and then he should be ready to depart. Three or four more days were wasted in inspecting a dealer's yard or two, without results; and then the day was fixed—in fact, the very day of the ball.

"When is it to be, Bobby? We must be off to-morrow."

"To-night, Tom; this very evening. I've nailed the old gentleman; and if he cuts up well, I shall go and buy that bay mare of old Grit. She'll carry me next season." And away went Mr. Munster.

Tom was condemned to a silent dinner, having played the rounds on the only Guardsman left at the Tower, one Treasury clerk, and the junior partner in a banking-house; all of whom were contemplating suicide the same evening, from the absence of their several late excitements. About

twelve o'clock he was debating in his own mind the propriety of shutting up his novel and allowing the porter to go to bed, when he was interrupted by a note from Munster, to come to his rescue in the Giltspur-street Compter.

Rubesco referens, but there he was. Like the Irish gentleman at Donnybrook Fair, or in the English House of Commons, it was not in the power of Robert Munster to leave London without a row of some kind. He had this time not descended to any of the ordinary methods of fashionable amusement. The case is a simple one; and the reader may probably search Holinshed's Chronicles in vain for a parallel. When Bobby appeared at his father's table in Russell-square, he was submitted to a severe disappointment, as his father had been before him, in Connemara, by the appointment of Sir Zachary Budget to an Indian judgeship. To his more matured taste, moreover, his father's cookery was very bad; and if the cellars were let furnished with the house, the choice samples

had certainly been removed. Altogether, things were not calculated to promote peace and goodwill towards man.

"Money, Robert," said the old gentleman; "rint, indeed! And how the divil do you expect the farm-buildings are to be kept up, if you are to eat up the proceeds? No, no, sir; you must go into less expensive quarters than Pumpington, and in time you will do well enough."

"Certainly, sir, if you wish it," said the penitent Bob; "I've already made arrangements for living in a small village, with a view to economy; but, in the mean time, a hundred or two would be of great service, if—"

"If I and your brothers and sisters would go and live in a small village, too. Bedad, sir"—and the old gentleman got quite Irish, which at other times he was not—"Bedad, sir, you're a profligate spendthrift."

"I beg your pardon, sir; but I have really not troubled you to pay, if I have a little exceeded."

"Not troubled me, Robert? I'll not submit to be spoken to in that way," rejoined Munster senior, who saw an honourable termination to the interview: "leave the room, sir; you're always at it;" and with a violence, half real and half feigned, the old man banged the door after him as he went out.

There remained but one course for Bobby, who smarted under the manifest injustice—to retire with a good grace, and trust to the tender mercies of Mr. Moss once more. "Upon my soul this is too bad," said he, as he seized his hat from the hall-table, and rushed down the door-steps, repeating aloud to himself "Always at it! that is a joke; why, I havn't seen him this nine months: always at it, indeed!" At this untoward moment, a most respectable Whitechapel leather-seller happened to be coming along the square, evidently bent upon catching the last Gray's-inn-lane omnibus; and right into Bobby he ran.

"I beg you ten thousand pardons," said

Hides; "I'm sure I didn't go to do it. I really didn't see."

"Confound you, sir, *you're always doing it!*" roared Munster; "and if you can't see, you can feel, I suppose?" which polite inquiry he accompanied with so vigorous a left-hander, that the leather-seller measured his stoutness on the *trottoir*. Policeman X had at that moment emerged from the area steps of a neighbouring house, after a valiant onslaught on beer, cold mutton, and hot pickles, with a very fair tap of Vauxhall gin-and-water, in the absence of the family at the sea-side, and was on his beat to meet his inspector, who as suddenly emerged from the opposite corner: of course he was bent upon doing his duty. Bobby was taken red-handed; and as neither money nor persuasion was of any use, and they were determined to make what they called an example of the first of the privileged classes who was caught, he was marched off to the station, the charge taken, and Bobby locked up in durance vile. It was first necessary to catch a

householder; a very rare article. In the present case it cost a sovereign; and perhaps, when the lateness of the hour and the special service required were considered, the respectable lady in bombazin and a coal-scuttle bonnet, who supplied that place by the complaisance of a night-porter or messenger, was cheap at the money. This little arrangement had just been completed, when Tom Crackenthorpe drove up in a cab; and he and the delinquent were enabled to return to the West-end together.

"This is rather a bore; eleven a.m. at the police-office, and eleven p.m. at the Pumpington Rooms. Suppose he insists upon locking you up for a week, Bob?"

"Oh! come, none of your playful suggestions."

"Well, it's just possible: the last time the Marquis was caught, old Hall vowed he would, the very next opportunity."

"By Jove, that wouldn't do at all: now let's have some gin and soda, and go to bed."

Eleven a.m. came on the eventful morning of the Pumpington ball; and with it Mr. Hall and his myrmidons. Bobby had not forfeited his bail, and Crackenthorpe attended to watch the proceedings. They were short and decisive.

"The next case. Come, be quick," said Mr. Hall, who was perspiring from head to foot, having just ordered a juvenile two dozen for illegal gambling—"the next case. Who's this?"

"Charles Johnson, your worship. Assault at 10 o'clock last night; gave his residence 379, Buckingham-street, Strand."

"Why, there are'nt more than thirty houses in the street."

"No, your honour."

Here the policeman entered into the details of the charge, which were fully substantiated by John Hides, the aggrieved leather-seller.

"Charles Johnson," said his worship, looking straight at Bobby Munster, "what are you?"

"A poet," said Bob, after a moment's hesitation.

"What are your ostensible means of living?"

"Nothing at all. I have no means."

"Do you mean to say you have neither profession nor any property; excepting that of an author, or a poet, as you are pleased to call yourself?"

"Yes, sir, I had some property once; but it's all gone," answered Robert, with an assurance that surprised even Crackenthorpe.

"And what have you done with it?"

"Spent it all, sir."

"How?"

"In bribing the critics."

A roar of laughter greeted this naïve announcement; but a London beak was too sharp even for Bobby Munster's simplicity.

"Inspector, do you know anything about this charge, and the person calling himself Charles Johnson?"

"Can't say as I *rightly* knows him, sir; but I fear he's a real bad 'un, your worship."

"So I suspected," said his worship, who was getting too cunning.

"A very bad 'un indeed—a Markis in disguise, I think," rejoined Policeman X.

As this seemed to be, at present, the very worst description of character out, a shudder ran through the aristocratic assembly of thieves and drunkards, and the magistrate looked as if he would like to put on the black cap. Bobby himself began to despair of dancing at Pumpington that night, as this invention of the "Markis" had given a bad turn to affairs. At that moment a friend at court appeared. An unobserved policeman, who had once or twice been engaged in encounters with Bob and his friends, with that generosity which distinguishes conquerors towards tributary states and captives, ranged up alongside of his quondam prisoner, and whispered, "Say you was drunk."

"But I wasn't," said Bob.

"That don't matter; we all on us tells lies here."

So our friend, not to be out of the fashion, told one too.

The effect produced was electrical. A kind of sympathy appeared to extend itself at once towards the prisoner. Hides' eye looked suddenly less black; indeed the announcement was calculated to open it. A little further conversation was carried on in a more favourable tone to the culprit, and it was finally announced to his worship, to the astonishment of Bob, by the friendly policeman, that the assault could be easily settled out of court, if his worship would inflict the usual fine.

"Charles Johnson, drunk and disorderly, fined 5*s*. What's the next case? Now, then, be as quick as you can."

We need hardly say that the 5*s*. was paid, and Hides was satisfied with a remunerative sovereign. The friendly policeman adjourned to a neighbouring public, with a strong party of sympathizing friends, where he drank a very fair share of the half-and-half which had been provided by Tom Crackenthorpe. Our heroes returned in a cab in time to pick up their luggage

and catch the afternoon train to Pumpington.

"You musn't look so like a Marquis the next time you're in trouble, Bob. It's quite clear the aristocracy is at a discount in the neighbourhood of Bow-street."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BACHELORS' BALL.

After the morning's amusement before Mr. Hall, it was not surprising that the prospect of the journey to Pumpington should be uninteresting enough. It is true that Tom Crackenthorpe employed himself in some sombre reflections on the coming ball—as to its success, and the anticipation of enjoyment peculiar to that sort of diversion. He had his misgivings as to his own capabilities as an Amphitryon, and certainly as to the eligibility of this species of hospitality. He was no bad hand at the top of a roystering dinner-table, especially where fox-hunting was likely to be "the toast" of the evening; he had presided in earlier life as president of the Jolly Dragons; he had been at Oxford the Most Noble Grand

of the celebrated order of Odd Fellows; and had faced a portentous sucking pig and plum sauce at a harvest home, with considerable effect. But it was a totally different thing to do the honours of a Pumpington ball-room: to bow to Lady Washpot, to receive the astounding beauty of the Parade in its evening costume, to talk military with old Bulrush, Borough politics with the Mayor, female accomplishments with Mrs. Jones, metaphysics with Miss Biddy Racoon, Scotch agriculture with Dingle Bogie, hunting with everybody, and to flirt at the same time with every young woman, who thought the master of the ceremonies, for the time being, fair game. It must be confessed that he got into the train at 4 p.m. with some misgivings. Bobby Munster's were of a different kind. He was not the sort of gentleman to make himself unhappy for other people—whether the guests enjoyed themselves or not, was to him a matter of perfect indifference. He was quite certain to dance to his own satisfaction with half-a-dozen young women

who were always amusing enough—either in their peculiarities, or in their admiration for himself; and the only thing which at all compromised his enjoyment was his failure upon his Governor's pocket. He regarded this in a very serious light; and the absence of old Grit's mare from the horse-boxes behind was not the most serious of its consequences; it took full twenty miles of the journey to reconcile him to the fact that something or other must be done to raise the wind. About this period of the journey, however, he looked up from a brown study, whose results had been only monosyllables as yet, and beheld before him the very ugliest young man it had ever been his happiness to meet.

The individual in question ought to have been favoured by Fortune; he was not so by Nature. He had a comfortable well-satisfied look however, which goes a great way; his hair, of the thick badly-got hay fashion and colour, could scarcely be said to be combed, but rather forked, low down on his forehead. His eyes were large, but

not lustrous, of the gooseberry order; his nose was broken and flat in the middle, and the end of it rather on one side; his whiskers met in what is commonly known as a Newgate fringe, and about five or six days' growth of moustache did not add to the beauty of a mouth which counterbalanced his nose by smiling on the wrong side. Nature seemed to have been setting right what she felt she had already set wrong. His dress was flash in the extreme; rings adorned his ungloved hands in considerable profusion and confusion, from a "seal ring of his grandfather's" to a sparkling emerald, the badge of the island whence he manifestly derived his origin and growth. Several lockets, supposed to contain hair and portraits of his *inamorate*, dangled conspicuously from his watch-chain, and a whole host of gridirons, ballet-dancers, warming-pans, mariners' compasses, and bassinets kept them company. Had he not looked inexpressibly soft, he might have been a prizefighter on Sunday out for an excursion-train holiday.

No sooner did he perceive Bobby Munster to have shaken the blue devils from him, "like dewdrops from the lion's mane," than he entered upon a conversation, cheerful enough, and not uninteresting to his companions.

"You'll not object to a little smoke, I preshume, gentlemen," said he; at the same time drawing out a black-looking pipe, which lay dormant in a breast-pocket, and flavoured the whole of his left side, inside and out, one might have imagined. Neither Crackenthorpe nor Munster could well object, upon principle; and, seeing the black pipe well alight, had recourse to one of the large regalias.

"It's to the Spa you'll be going?" said he, after he had got the pipe well under weigh; "faith, it's a charming place is Pumpington."

Both of our friends assented, and wondered they had never seen the gentleman in that favoured place before.

"Bedad, it's a long time, anyhow three or four years, since I was in the town. I

wouldn't be going now, but there's a great ball to-night, and I couldn't get off anyhow. May-be you'll know Crackenthorpe?"

Bobby thought he'd seen him.

"Capital fellow, bedad, I'm told: does the thing well. Fine property, and a great domain in the West Injies—I'd be glad to have a slice of it."

"He has a good property, I believe," said the unabashed Bobby; whilst Crackenthorpe buried himself deeper in his book than ever. "Then you know the people at Pumpington well, I suppose?"

"Would I know my own mother, if I was to see her? more by token she's dead since I was an infant. Don't I know everybody in the place? There's the Joneses and the Bulrushes, them's a proud lot; and the Grizzells, and Ould Lawyer Sparkes—Sharks I used to call him; and the Bogie, and the O'Toole—he's the man that can cross a counthry, divil a sowl betther in Pumpington."

"Perhaps you are going to the ball with Sir MacShanus to-night?" said Bobby en-

couragingly, and wondering what revelations were coming.

"Indeed and I am: it's the young ladies that's going, too."

"Yes; the room will be pretty full. Everybody will be there."

"Will it be a good supper? I like a supper. It's impossible to dance without champagne. I suppose Crackenthorpe will be for marrying one of them Bulrushes: they tell me he's mighty thick there."

"Well; I should say not!" said Bobby, who was just in time to prevent Tom from stopping him, by honestly introducing himself. The opportunity was, however, lost by the rejoinder:

"Bedad, sir, he must marry—they'll be taking him by storm. There's no rest but the grave for the like of him among the women. Don't I know them?"

"You seem to have had great experience." Tom was still buried in the *N.S.M.*

"Expariance! you may say that! I'm eight-and-twenty, and they proposed to me

eight times in two seasons. It's the mothers puts 'em up to it."

"It seems marvellous that you should have escaped."

"Escaped? It was a marvellous escape! What, you heard of it, did ye? Faith, the first ball went clane through me hat, and the second took away the end of me neck-cloth. It was a delicate affair that; but mum, you know, where a lady's concerned. It's a bad thing to be playing the fool in that way. But there's a Mr. Munster, I'm told, gives the enthertainment with Mr. Crackenthorpe. He's a most extraordinary fellow that; a counthryman of my own, partly, I believe, and how he manages without a shilling!"

"Pardon me," said Tom, thinking that affairs were arriving at a crisis. "Pardon me: I must not allow you to remain any longer in ignorance that this is Mr. Munster, and I—well, I'm Mr. Crackenthorpe."

"Oh! by the piper that played before Moses, I've put my foot in it," said the very cheerful but unguarded Irishman; "if

I've said anything, now—but you'll forgive me?"

"We owe you the apology for not at first telling you, and we shall be very happy to see you this evening."

"Yes," said Munster; "and as you seem to have a taste for champagne ——"

"As you're sthrong, be merciful, Mr. Munster; I'll be charmed to accept your kind invitation."

"And I think we can promise you an interview with most of your former friends; there are still some of the mothers left at Pumpington, whose attentions you found so difficult to escape from."

"Oh! Mr. Munster," said the Irishman, with a conscious leer and deprecatory smile; "you've looked upon such matters with considerable discernment, and you will be glad to know that the race is not extinct." And here, by way of finishing the conversation gracefully, Bob produced 'L'Homme à l'Oreille cassée,' and began to read. The Irishman blew his cloud in silence, and pondered on his last narrow escape.

At length they reached Pumpington: the first thing was to see that the arrangements had been satisfactorily carried out in their absence; and the next to have their dinner, which was ordered at seven o'clock. Preoccupation made dinner not altogether a form, but nearly so, with Crackenthorpe. Before dressing he read a letter from his mother, which, by prescriptive right as an author, I present to the reader, however a breach of confidence under ordinary circumstances. It ran thus:—

"Torquay, August 25th.

"My dear Tom,

"Thank you very much for your letter. I am sorry I cannot be with you on the 29th; but my health, as you know, does not admit of such constant moving. Having reached this place from Paris, I must stay here till the contrast between the two has done me good. The stupidest place I ever was in—the most lovely country, and the very vilest bonnets. The crinolines are worn here much too large; and the place is full of jackasses, bathing-women, and physicians. I am so charmed to hear of you taking a country house; I shall come to take care of it for you myself.

Pray don't let those Pumpington women marry you: as to your friend, Mr. Munster, it might do him good, and would certainly serve him right. Mind you have your hair cut properly. If young men only knew the importance of these little things. And I hope you always go to church on Sundays: it gives a good tone, and of late years has been quite the thing to do. The embassy service in Paris is very well attended, at least in the morning; besides you know it is a duty. That's one reason why I like your friend Bingham; I think you should cultivate his acquaintance, he is always in good society; but I don't know about the women. You ought to make a very good match, for you know you will have a very fine income. Do not fail to let me know all about the ball, and believe me,

"My dearest boy, your affectionate mother,

"LUCY CRACKENTHORPE.

"P.S.—Let me know whether you think that new colour, magenta, the emperor's colour, is becoming to fair women. You used to be a bit of an artist, and had an eye for colour especially."

So much for Mrs. Crackenthorpe, thought Tom, as he folded up the letter. She'll be a little inconvenienced at Lushenham when

we get there; however, she's an excellent woman, and I love her dearly, so she shall do as she likes. As these thoughts passed through the brain of our friend, he gave a finishing touch to his back hair, looked once more in his glass, and slipped into a very comfortable garment called a coat, but which our grandfathers would have called a dressing-gown. On his way down-stairs he met Bobby Munster, with Halston and Butterton, whom he was enlivening with an account of the police-office, and an explanation of the report. At the foot of the stairs stood Lord Cropperton, in travelling costume, and desiring his servant, in the confusion, to ascertain which was his room. Then the bell rang, and a furious cannonade of post-horses, imperials, and a lady's-maid with a parrot, announced an arrival, and Crackenthorpe thought it about time to go into the rooms. In the supper-room he found a servant, who condescended to explain the time his master would like the supper served, and said he had made it early rather, "as people didn't eat quite so

much soon after dinner." He treated Tom *de haut en bas* until he found out who he was, when he condescended to submit to his orders, and put the supper back an hour or two. Having returned, after making what he thought admirable arrangements for everybody's feeding, he got back into the ball-room, where the company was beginning to arrive. The Joneses came early, sorely against the parents' desire. Mrs. Jones thought it fashionable to be late; Mr. Jones was in no hurry to leave a bottle of Sparkes's port. Clara knew better; she knew Crackenthorpe must be there, and "first come, first served." She looked for a dance in her new sky-blue silk with the pink rosettes. She'd have spoilt anything in the world—an offer itself—by trying to hold it out. The Sparkses were not yet come, but Miss Biddy Racoon was there, with the Irish Yahoo, the railway acquaintance, who would have made the most of it had not Crackenthorpe stopped him, assuring him that he felt no offence, and was very glad to see him. Sir Mac-

Shanus O'Toole of course had brought "his darters," and wished to introduce his young friend Mr. Dermot Macgillicuddy, cousin of Macgillicuddy of the Reeks. Mr. Crackenthorpe had had the pleasure of meeting him before. Then came a visible addition to the rapidly assembling company—the Bulrushes had arrived; a large and important party. A rustle of the most magnificent crinolines amongst the young women, and a strong detachment of many-coloured turbans, announced the Mayor, Mrs. Mayoress and family, several members of the Corporation of Pumpington, and the several corporations of the members for Pumpington, both of whom appeared upon this occasion. Mr. Crackenthorpe was a subscriber to the hounds too, and the M. F. H.—a short, vulgar sort of man, a semi-gentleman, who got his living out of them, and showed excellent sport, performing all the dirty offices himself—brought his *lady*, as she was called, in distinction to the rest of the women, who were wives. By the time the Misses Sparkes had settled their wreaths and hooked up

Fanny Grizzell's dress, which was getting too small for her, and had given a little since dinner in different places, it seemed time to begin. Hunting-men at Pumpington are tremendous fellows to dance, and have quite as much of the bear as of the jackass about them. Tom Crackenthorpe settled himself down for a regular night of it, and commenced operations at once with Plumper's wife, M.P. for the borough. Munster suited his taste, and selected Clara Jones. She really was a very pretty girl, and had done her best to return as equally as possible the great amount of love that had been made to her: Bobby had the greatest share. Amelia Sparkes fell to the lot of Jack Halston; and Marian Bulrush, by some eccentric means, found herself in the full enjoyment of the richest brogue she had as yet heard. The shock-headed Irishman was flirting and dancing with equal vigour. A quadrille—the first quadrille, even at Pumpington, is always respectable; neither men nor women feel quite at home with their tongues. Fresh introductions

want thawing and old ones renewing: but after that, with such materials for raising the caloric as are to be found at the Spa, an iceberg would melt in a quarter of an hour. Maidens fair, of forty; charming widows from the East, all jewels and jointure; portionless girls, in an atmosphere of flounces, *bouquet du roi*, sandal-wood, and violets; match-making mammas, of a natural talent and acquired experience, which pokes the fire and then puts up the guard; liverless bachelors, all cayenne pepper, turtle, and Peruvian cyanokaita; middle-aged dandies, retired rakes, and rollicking Irishmen, who were ready at a moment's notice to run away with anybody who could pay for the posters—not the four-posters—or help any brother in distress to do the same. Before long the room was a blaze of light gauze, back-hair, dust, and amazement; the music thundered away, the Irishman howled, the revellers perspired; even Lord Cropperton and Ned Bingham caught the infection, and the universal world seemed turned upside down. Below the shindy was equally

prononcé, and the occasion more attractive. Claret-cup, sherry-negus, mulled-port, and gin-punch were refreshing the weary or strengthening the timid; and along the charming little seats and ottomans in the passages and byways vows were exchanged, never to be broken — till next week. Plaintive accents of unconditional acceptances were heard; suggestions to "call on papa" were negatived; ladders of ropes, post-chaises and four, "my degree," "got my step," "uncle's death," "Dear mamma, what will she say?" with "Oh! Captain Smith, they are coming this way!" produced a Babel of whispers which might have been appreciated in the gallery of St. Paul's. Amongst these heroes, we regret to say, figured Mr. Munster. He was vowing eternal fidelity to Clara Jones, who was wondering where dear mamma was gone, not being anxious to commit herself until she had heard the result of another search in Doctors' Commons, and yet tempted strongly by the melodramatic appeals of the amorous Bob to trust herself to

the care of that impulsive young man. They were, however, aroused from their blissful dream by the announcement of supper, and it is but justice to say that most of the ladies and gentlemen were so accustomed to the evening's amusement and its results that scarcely any diminution of appetite appeared among them. We must give Tom the credit he deserved upon this occasion, by assuring the reader that, though he may have been sorely tempted, he scrupulously abstained, in his character as host, from any declaration of love to his guests. He had ascertained from Lawyer Sparkes that Lushenham had become his for a term of years, and he was satisfied with making himself as agreeable as possible, short of a proposal of marriage, to Amelia or Jemima.

"Then he must pay the bill at last," said the lawyer to a magnificent dame in moiré-antique and point-lace lappets, who was no other than his own wife.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CATASTROPHE.

WHILST affairs were going thus swimmingly in the ball and supper-rooms there was a small conspiracy hatching in a back-room which was destined to create a sensation later in the evening, or, rather, later in the morning of the coming day. At the back of the principal rooms, now surrendered to the votaries of Terpsichore, was one which seemed rather to belong to the too-ardent worshippers of Bacchus. It was small, snug, and redolent of old clothes upon ordinary occasions, being used to hang up cloaks, bonnets, damp umbrellas, goloshes, and patent india-rubber utensils, whether portable-baths, driving-capes, or gig-aprons. At the present time it was converted into a much pleasanter and healthier atmosphere

by the admission of sundry barrels of oysters, foaming tankards of bottled porter, warm tumblers of gin-and-water, and a bowl of reeking punch, which some half-dozen men had been, and still were, discussing, with the ordinary sporting topics of the day. I am bound to admit that both Pumpington and Lushenham partake very strongly of the sporting element. Men of feeling will detect the sentimental in Clara Jones or Amelia Sparkes; men of action, the practical in Lawyer Sparkes and Bobby Munster; men of fashion, the aristocratic in a live earl and the Hon. Biddy Racoon; but Tom Crackenthorpe is a sportsman, and we are not anxious to divest our characters of that peculiar element which modern writers of extraordinary felicity of expression have called their *spécialité*. Some half-dozen men, who—with a perversity of taste quite incomprehensible, excepting that opening an oyster is very much easier to some people than opening a conversation—had left the society of charming women and iced champagne for their own finger-

spoiling and indigestible occupation, were enjoying themselves thoroughly in their own way in this little back-parlour. They had it all to themselves, and their anecdotes of dogs, horses, and guns gave them the liveliest satisfaction. It is but justice to say that amongst old Joe Millers, which flourished under a new dynasty of names, some original and racy anecdotes appeared; and Jack Halston's piebald pony, and Tom Cracks's ride home with the drunken post-boy, had to be repeated more than once during the evening, as an empty barrel rolled out of the room and a full one took its place.

"Chaw-ming gurl, that little Bingham: rides too, splendid, 'pon my soul," said a hairy sub, sticking an oyster-knife at the same time into his finger, and dropping it immediately. "Cracks seems sweet on the chesnut filly, eh?"

"Oh! nonsense, he's provided for long ago; the General couldn't afford to let him go," said young Naylor in reply, plunging afresh into the barrel, with his mouth full

of new bread and butter, "he's always there; to my certain knowledge, he dined there three times the week before last, and I saw Mawy Anne widing his woan mare the day before yesterday."

"Well! I don't see why a fellow shouldn't marry, if he likes," said Jack Halston. "What can it signify whose horse she rides, if she don't wear the breeches?"

"Talking of horses, Jack, how's Piebald? Nice pony—very—dances, don't he?"

"Capitally. And walks up and down stairs like a human; better than you plungers. I'll lay a hundred he walks into the ball-room and down again before you, if you'll put on your sword," rejoined Jack Halston.

"Aw—aw—aw," roared the Plunger, stroking his moustache, and diving into the porter. "Like to see him; owners up, eh, Jack?"

"Oh! that's immaterial. Will you lay me a hundred he don't do it now?"

At this juncture the door opened, and in came Bob Munster with his railroad

acquaintance, Mr. Macgillycuddy—what a name it is to write! The Irishman was considerably the better for his supper. It was quite clear that he hadn't stuck to the water-jug; and he looked more frightfully ugly than ever. He was quite at home, and bent upon distinguishing himself in some manner.

"What's the bet?" said Munster; and the information was imparted in a Babel-like confusion of tongues.

"Bless me life, man! it's the aisiest thing in the world. My grandfather of the Reeks had a pony that slept in the atties: and what's more, he died in 'em like a Christian. The great fool of a servant put on a straw mattress, and he ate it all, and it gave him the cholic. I'll back the pony; they're clever animals, is ponies."

"You remember Joe Smith, the Colonel of the Prince's Buffers? Well, he had a pony which walked clean over the turnpike gate, step by step; and what's more, he took the buggy with him. It was a

very light one, you know," said Mr. Munster, who was wondering how far he might venture without having an oyster-knife stuck into him, or being shot through the body in the morning.

"Come, come, Bobby, that's too good. But you know Tom Cosgrave? He had a pony that went under a gate, carriage and all; and it only knocked his hat off." At this sally there was another roar.

"Bedad, now, you're joking!" expostulated the Irishman.

"Not a bit of it. No more than yourself. If you don't believe it, *you can see the gate to-morrow*—it's on the road to Lushenham."

Such a proof being considered by all present as highly satisfactory, nothing more could be urged against the veracity of the *raconteur*; and the Cornet, having expressed his determination to back himself for a hundred to get up and into the ball-room as far as the first chandelier, and back again and down-stairs, sword and all, before the piebald pony, he at a walk and

the pony at any pace he pleased, it only remained to take him up and find a rider. The most difficult thing, the finding the money, was not adverted to. The bet included the necessity of the performance during the evening.

"My servant is in the supper-room," said Jack Halston; "send him here, waiter." He had put his head into the room, and withdrawn it under a pressure of oyster-shells. "Fetch up the circus pony." The man stared at his master, as well he might. "Never mind about dressing him over. Be back in a quarter of an hour, saddled and bridled, and let us know."

The interim was employed in finding a rider. As the Irishman had protested in favour of the pony, it was agreed, on all sides, that he was the most eligible pilot. He was not bashful, and readily gave way to the solicitations of his friends. Before the arrival of his mount he had backed himself for five-and-twenty pounds; and in another ten minutes was in the saddle prepared for his ride.

The dragoon would willingly have withdrawn, but Jack Halston was not a man to be off when he contemplated winning. It was not by any means the first hundred he had won in a similar manner. The Irishman, however, was no sooner mounted, than a little delicacy presented itself—the ladies. What would the ladies say? "Lord love you, my dear fellow, the ladies here are getting quite used to it: they rather like it: that pony nearly lives on the stairs." Then, if that was the case, it wasn't worth while sacrificing five-and-twenty pounds to a sentiment which would not be appreciated.

Upstairs the fun was going fast and furious. Not the slightest idea existed of the treat that was in store for the enraptured youth of either sex, who were breathing soft nothings into one another's ears, or squeezing about in a convenient crowd to the lascivious trombone and amorous clarionet, which bellowed forth "The First-love" waltz. Every man to his taste. And whilst Mr. Crackenthorpe

was making people happy with the elegances of social life, his coadjutor Mr. Munster was preparing his divertissements below.

In the midst of a most uproarious galloppade, in which many twinkling feet and tongues were giving effect to the music, an awful gong was heard. The folding-doors of the drawing-room suddenly opened, and on the stairs approaching the ball-room was seen a very edifying spectacle. The whole house was lighted of course with gas, and gave effect from its brilliancy to the group below. Up two or three steps at a time struggled the gallant piebald, under the load of the unsteady Irishman, floundering about on his hind legs, but managing to pull himself along to the infinite delight of the tipsy rider, and to the wonder and confusion of the dancers. The cornet of dragoons held on manfully, two steps at a time; but confined to a walk, and encumbered by his sword, which, according to agreement, was to dangle behind him, was considerably outpaced by the circus pony.

The Irishman shouted at the top of his voice—the sabre clattered behind—and the pony was about to enter the *salon*, to the delight of some, the wonder of all, and the inconvenience of a few, who had scarcely yet accustomed themselves to the fashionable eccentricities of the Pumpington gaieties, when, without the slightest warning, the gas shot up in a brilliant jet, and then left the horseman, the dragoon, their supporters, and the spectators in impenetrable darkness. Every light in that part of the establishment was simply gone, as effectually as if the whole scene had at once been plunged into the infernal regions. The Irishman yelled—the dragoon halted and swore—Jack Halston and his crew shouted with laughter; Crackenthorpe, who was rushing to seize the pony and throw the rider down-stairs head foremost, was arrested midway in his career—the women shrieked; and the pony, having suspended operations by so unexpected a termination, turned suddenly round and shot the unhappy Macgillycuddy, fortu-

nately on the top of his head, straight into the ball-room. Now was the Cornet's time to grope his way to the chandelier and return in the arms of victory; but the envious goddess, who holds the scales and presides over fair play, brought to bear upon the Cornet's handsome nose the fist of an irate gentleman, who was expressing his disgust in a somewhat vigorous manner, and spoilt his beauty. Fearful of a second accident, the gallant dragoon turned tail and disappeared.

When once more the gas came to life, the scene was curious to an uninterested observer. Young ladies—not exactly in hysterics—had taken refuge in curious places; gentlemen had their arms full. In front of it all was our Hibernian friend, being led away passively, between a couple of recently made acquaintances, with two black eyes and his nose bleeding: he was also short of a front tooth. The piebald was walking towards the bedrooms, having picked up some scarves and a good quantity of lace in the confusion. The more orderly

of the company returned to their partners; only six ladies fainted, and were brought to by pressing attention to their wants; only six more left the room; the small oyster-room got fuller than ever; bets were declared off; the Cornet never showed again at Pumpington; and the Irishman was not heard of until three seasons afterwards, when he married Miss Biddy Racoon. Dancing and a second supper were kept up with much spirit till five in the morning; and everybody went home, to get up with a headache or a heartache, and many with both. One little incident deserves to be mentioned, with which we may take leave of Pumpington, and carry our readers to other scenes more congenial to the pursuits of Tom Crackenthorpe and his friends.

Bobby Munster remembered, the day after, that he had ventured upon a rather strong expression of affection to Clara Jones, and was not quite certain how far that young lady might consider him, as well as herself, committed, if it suited her

purpose. His mind was scarcely made up by five o'clock p.m.; so he strolled out to the Parade, on his way to look after his domestic interests. He was very proud of having at least made a decided conquest; of that there could be no doubt. He met the gossiping Mrs. Markby and her yellow daughter at the corner; the latter of whom informed him that poor dear Clara had disappeared from the ball in company with Mr. Halston, and that the family was in convulsions, as she had not been heard of since. "But, dear me, Mr. Munster, what are such feathers and furbelows likely to come to?" I need scarcely suggest that Miss Markby's style was decidedly inelaborate. No further light was ever thrown upon the sudden darkness of the ball-room. Everybody, except Mr. Munster, heartily abused the clerk of the gas-works.

CHAPTER X.

AFTER THE BALL.

While Tom Crackenthorpe had been enjoying himself and entertaining his friends, negotiations had been going on for the house at Lushenham swimmingly. When there is no particular object in delay, *i. e.* when the lawyer's bill will not be lengthened by procrastination, nor the landlord be benefited by keeping out the tenant, you may be pretty sure of having your business done. If, on the contrary, delay involves more six-and-eightpenny visits or three-and-fourpenny letters, or if you happen to be a nervous subject, and very anxious to get in by a certain day, and would sacrifice a ten-pound note for the sake of comfort, the whole staff becomes affected with moral paralysis: the bricklayers rest on their

steps, and the carpenters suspend the operations of their plummets and lines, until the unfortunate hitch, that no fellow could have foreseen, is set right. Sometimes, if you are very anxious indeed, it cannot be set right at all without new agreements, or an additional 500*l.*, or some moderate sum of that kind, which is nicely calculated as an additional sacrifice worthy of the expenses already incurred. In the present case nothing of the sort happened. Old Sparkes behaved with exemplary honesty, for he felt there was nothing more to get, as Crackenthorpe was away; and he had a shrewd suspicion that letters would not be answered.

Having visited Lushenham once more, the day after the ball—having indulged in Farmer Simcox's tap to a moderate extent, given some orders about the loose boxes outside, as well as inside, and very particular directions for the erection of a leaping-bar in the field at the back of the house, Tom took the train to London. He was unaccompanied by Mr. Robert Munster,

that gentleman being employed in swallowing his violent grief for the loss of his dear Clara, soothing his ruffled vanity, and endeavouring to provide himself with a gun at the longest possible credit, for the coming campaign against the partridges. An advertisement of a rather curious character had attracted Crackenthorpe's attention. It was on the subject of partridge-shooting: "To be let, for one month only, from the 1st of September, 2000 acres of excellent shooting," &c. &c. &c. He had been so successful on his first introduction to an advertisement, that he felt bound to stand by them for the rest of his life. This promised everything: lots of birds, first-rate keeper, picturesque comfortably-furnished cottage, two packs of hounds (very useful, in September, before breakfast), trout-stream, within reach of a country town, and an able practitioner. This latter was of inestimable value. To Tom Crackenthorpe it held out one advantage that was not mentioned by the advertiser. It was not very far from some shooting which had been taken by Lord

Cropperton and Ned Bingham; and, though not wary, he was quite sensible enough to know that he might as well have something or somebody to fall back upon, in the case of disappointment.

The applicant was directed for particulars to Messrs. Cutpurse and Co., solicitors, 103, Pluckham-court, High Holborn, where an interview with the principal might be obtained, if necessary. This looked honest. And no sooner was Mr. Thomas Crackenthorpe shot out of the train at Euston Square, than he mounted a Hansom cab and wended his way to High Holborn. There was but one day to spare before the commencement of operations against the birds, and Cutpurse and Co. were on the look-out when the new client arrived.

"Jenkins," said Cutpurse, from an inner chamber.

"Yes, sir," said Jenkins, a mouldy-looking young man from the so-called office: at the same time putting in his head to see, as well as hear, what was the matter.

"I'm sure the young man now at the

door, and looking for the number and the bell, is come about that shooting. Say Mr. Cutpurse is not at home, but there's somebody here to give every information."

"Yes, sir; but perhaps he isn't come about that business."

"Bless me, Jenkins! what a fool you are! Don't you see he's a sportsman? Look at his hat, and his pin, and his dog-skin gloves, and thick laced boots."

Mr. Cutpurse was a man of observation.

A pull at the bell decided the question as to the *where*, and a few minutes more as to the *what* he wanted.

"Gentleman wishes to see Mr. Cutpurse about the shooting in ——shire," said Jenkins, handing in Tom's card, and followed immediately by Tom himself.

"Mr. Cutpurse?" said that gentleman, hesitating, not as to whether it would be desirable to deny his own identity, but whether a temporary absence or a more decided disappearance of the principal actor were the better. He soon made up his mind. "Pray take a seat, sir. I'm sorry to say

Mr. Cutpurse left town yesterday — only yesterday. Gone abroad, sir ; gone abroad, and left the business in our hands."

"Oh! I see," said Tom, who really saw Cutpurse, only he didn't know it—"I see, you are agents for the proprietor. I understood that the principal could be seen."

"The principal! pre-e-cisely," said the man, absent in the spirit, but in Pluckham Court in the flesh. "As I said, he went abroad only yesterday. Most unfortunate : such excellent shooting, too!"

"What! gone with Mr. Cutpurse—gone together?"

"Pre-e-cisely." The fact is, that Cutpurse himself had taken the shooting at a nominal rent, to let again. "He is with Mr. Cutpurse."

"And the shooting, you say, is very good?"

"Good? bless me! indeed it is good. Of course *I* can't say that I've seen it ; but we live upon it here, I believe : partridges all day — every day ; hares, rabbits, and all sorts of game."

"And who had the shooting last season? I suppose Mr. Cutpurse would refer me to him?"

"Sir Peregrine Fox has had it for two or three seasons. Here's his address, sir: you can write or call, if you please."

Sir Peregrine was a middle-aged baronet, out at elbows, unscrupulous, and needy. He made the acquaintance of Mr. Cutpurse under circumstances which involved the renewal of various bills and the intervention of some dark-complexioned foreign gentleman, and the supposititious transfer of pictures, wines, tubs of tallow, and goose-feathered mattresses. Having obtained in ready money six hundred and seventy pounds for a note-of-hand value one thousand, he felt himself under deep obligation to Cutpurse, and was prepared at a moment's notice to give his shooting a character.

"Can one see it? Not above a couple of hours by rail is it from London?"

"About two hours." Consulting his

watch at the same time, he added, "You could run down and see it, sir, in an hour from this time, and be back again in the evening, if you wish it."

Tom thought it was feasible; he therefore asked what would be about the rent, which he thought rather high, seeing it was 1*s.* an acre per month, and whether it could be had for a longer period without much additional expense. Of course all points were conceded, the material one appearing to be on its way to accomplishment, at least as far as Mr. Cutpurse's belief in his own intentions could guarantee them. Having committed himself to nothing, and believing all things, even his own identity, he bowed to Mr. Crackenthorpe; and, Mr. Jenkins retreating before him to the street door, with "Mind the step," "In the dark, sir," and "Take care of your head as you go out," that gentleman found himself in the street.

"Jenkins, come here. Be off to the telegraph-office at once, and send down this

to Tim Farbrace, gamekeeper, Fox-holes, Axall Station. Be as quick as you can; I doubt he won't go; but it's as well to be on the safe side."

Tim Farbrace was an idle vagabond, half-poacher, half-keeper—up to everything. As his getting a keeper's wages depended on the letting of the shooting, of course he was equally zealous and unprincipled as his master. Just now he was smoking his after-dinner pipe and drinking strong beer at the 'Chequers,' in rather a despondent state of mind at not having heard from Mr. Cutpurse lately. The last speculator had been frightened away by taking the wrong beat first and finding no birds. Tim had determined that that shouldn't happen next time; indeed, he proposed quite a new method, if he could but manage it. He was beginning his third pint, when old widow Dooley's son arrived from the station with a telegraphic message for Farbrace. It was very concise: "Gent coming down; green. Cutpurse gone abroad."

Fortunately, Tim was in full possession of his faculties. So, upon receipt of this intelligence, he went first to the cottage. It was very cheerful-looking, and well-placed; so that, excepting for the holes in the roof, which let in the wet, and the chimneys, which all smoked, and the want of furniture, and the bad drainage, it was a very comfortable place. The first thing he did was to borrow a small sofa from a neighbouring cottage, and two easy chairs from another friendly hand in the village; for, as everybody wanted a pigeon to pluck, they were all willing enough to assist in catching him. Having dressed out the place in these borrowed plumes, the next consideration was himself and the manor. He was aware that a day-labourer's smock was not quite the costume to give an air of sport to the thing: so, calling at his cottage, he put on an old velveteen coat, took from a drawer a whistle with a string and a strong dog-whip, put on some tight gaiters and ankle-jacks, and presented an

appearance altogether delusive as regarded his real merits or occupation. Having diligently sought for his friend and brotherchip, Mr. Thistledown, the keeper of the next beat to his own, Broadacres (also a few hundred acres in the market from season to season, and now taken by a fast young stockbroker), he explained to him the nature of his position.

"Now you know, Bill, this year you're got a sight o' birds, and we ain't got none —leastways on one side the manor. So don't you come round on our side o' the manor too early to-morrow morning, for I'm going to borrow most o' your birds. I shall go and drive over ourn into them further turnips, nearest the cottage, and take him over them as soon as he comes down, and leave yourn for an early walk to-morrow. He ain't beginning to shoot, for he ain't got the place yet."

So saying, away he strode towards the west side of the shooting, and was not very long before he had sent over

a pretty fair complement on to the barren side.

"There," said Tim, "I think I've kuk'd his guuse for un this time."

As Crackenthorpe was strolling along towards the station, whom should he fall upon, pursuing a very noiseless, philosophizing tenour of his way, about the top of Regent Street and Oxford Street, but Ned Bingham? He, too, was on his road to Lord Cropperton's manor, and only waiting till the train should start, which arrives about dinner-time. After the usual greetings had passed, he said—

"Do you know of a good dog or two for sale? I know it's late in the day; but I only just now made up my mind, and I must put up with what I can get."

"Why, where are you going to begin the season?" asked Bingham.

"Not above twenty miles from Cropperton's," said Cracks. On some place near Axall—that Sir Peregrine Fox used to have. In fact, I'm going to look at it to-night."

"Ah! it's a little late, isn't it?" said Bingham. "*Experto crede:* mind those fellows about shooting; they'll do you as sure as you're alive. But what *do* you want with a dog?"

"Why, to shoot to, to be sure."

"What! a pointer?" said Bingham.

"Yes!" said Crackenthorpe, with his eyes and mouth wide open. "What should it be for? Have a cigar?"

"Ha! ha! ha! Ho! ho! ho!" roared Bingham. "Well, that's good! so you're going to shoot with a dog? Lord bless you, man! nobody shoots with a dog now. The keeper has his own retriever very likely; if not, you must buy one. But pointers and setters — there's not such a thing left, excepting in some old-fashioned out-of-the-way places that one never goes to."

"Then what *do* they do? They must find the game."

"Walk 'em up. Lord! Cracks, what are you thinking about? I suppose you're not much of a hand at it."

"Well, not much. You know I always liked hunting, and I didn't care much about the pigeons on Cowley Marsh—or being caught poaching at Abingdon. So that this is really my first season by myself; but I suppose there are lots of birds?"

"Oh! yes, there's plenty of birds in that country, as a rule; but all I say is, look out sharp; for they'll do you if they can. And that old Fox is as bad as Cutpurse himself, I suspect. It's a bad feature in the case. belonging to a lawyer to start with, and he gone abroad. By all means go down and look for yourself: and mind you go exactly the opposite way to the one he tries to persuade you. You'll come over and see us, old fellow, and have a day or two now and then?"

Cracks walked on towards the S.W. Terminus, and reached it in time to look about him. The conclusion of his research was that the whole world consisted of dogs, guns, and billycock hats: there was scarcely anything else to be seen there. He turned over Bingham's advice in his mind, wished

he had brought Bobby Munster with him, and felt almost inclined to turn back. However, he had taken his ticket and his place, and determined not to be daunted by six or eight hours' inconvenience. What he did, and how he succeeded, deserves another chapter.

CHAPTER XI.

SOME SHOOTING.

Our hero was not long in following the telegram. Tim Farbrace and his mother, who acted as housekeeper, had just managed to arrange the last chair, and had put the 'Sportsman's Directory,' two odd volumes of the 'Old Sporting Review,' and 'The Life of John Mytton,' by Nimrod, on the top of the family Bible, when the white smoke of the engine was seen coming through the valley. It gave a comfortable two hours for a walk over one side of the manor, and Tim had taken care that that should do for the afternoon's beat; the to-morrow, like a good Christian, he left to take care of itself, with a strong suspicion, however, that he could give it a helping hand with considerably more effect than

Providence. By the time his meditation had reached this point, the train had reached the Axall Station, and in a few minutes more he was confronted with his intended victim.

"Ain't got ne'er a dog, sir?" said he; "sorry for it, as I didn't know as you was a-coming. But, excuse me, sir, and I'll go and fetch old Nell; or p'raps we can take it on our road."

He then began to describe the boundaries of the manor, from the cottage-garden, whence certain points were visible; told how they shot four brace in them turnips, six in they swedes, and never see such a lot in his life as there was in that standing barley. Standing barley was a sort of Canaan to Crackenthorpe, who, his capacity being limited, regarded a fifteen yards' rise as somewhat wild. He nodded his head, however, not unmindful of Ned Bingham, and prepared for a start.

We left Munster deploring his hurt vanity and lost love at Pumpington. No sooner had he ascertained that his dear Clara was gone, than he turned his attention to some

more profitable investment of his time than love-making. But as nothing can be done in this world without money — at least pocket-money, which even men who live upon nothing per annum are bound to have —Bobby turned his first thoughts to that important subject. London is always connected with this subject, and very properly. One seems, amidst so much wealth, to be positively pelted with the vile dross, and, like abuse, some of it is sure to stick. That must be the general idea; for whenever a poor devil, out at elbows, determines upon a vigorous effort to recruit exhausted resources, he always feels compelled to run up to town; and, once in town, there is but one quarter, and that's the City. So thought Bobby. But in turning over in his mind the numberless persons to whom he had at times been professionally indebted, he remembered one Cutpurse and Co. It is but honest to say that he did not believe in the Co. Cutpurse alone he recognised, and a visit to High Holborn might save him a longer walk.

The negotiations were not of a formidable character to one accustomed to the business. To the neophyte, fifty pounds out of five hundred for six months represents simply twenty per cent.; and therefore the seventy-five pounds which Bobby Munster consented to relinquish represents just thirty per cent. It was very moderate, considering that the security was nearly personal, with a rather questionable post-obit on the family estate. There was a curious condition attached, less vulgar than wine, bottles, pictures, or raw hides; it was a little shooting at a hundred pounds, which Mr. Munster could let again, or induce some of his friends to share "at an increased rate," as Mr. Cutpurse observed, and which remark we must do Bobby the justice to say he would have resented by knocking him down, but he could not afford the luxury at that moment. It may seem odd that Mr. Cutpurse should have had so much shooting on hand, but we are in a position to state that it was the same which he had already proposed to let to Crackenthorpe. Two strings to your

bow is a prudent saying, and the lawyer acted up to it. Truth to say, he had no idea that Tom would have gone down, and still less that he would take it. He looked undecided, and came to so little explanation that he could easily back out, and as to letting so brilliant an opportunity as the present escape him, it was not to be thought of. So before Mr. Munster had got possession of the cheque, it was arranged that the price of the shooting was to be deducted, with the percentage, and Bobby departed, richer than when he came to town by 325*l.* (minus some moderate charges for stamp and professional attendance), and by 2000 acres of excellent shooting for the month of September, over which his friend Crackenthorpe was just then preparing to make his survey.

Amongst other odd properties, the possession of Munster, was a pointer, better known than trusted about Pumpington, a bandy-legged, overgrown brute, remarkable as a thief, and for his surly, ill-conditioned temper. For some reason or other Bobby

was extremely fond of Sancho, whom his friends called The Butcher, and was always loud in praise of his capabilities, of which he, Bobby, could know nothing, and of his breed, of which he must have known less. By a piece of excellent luck this animal was at present a mile or two only from town, and could be got at a moment's notice. He employed, therefore, the rest of the day in equipping himself with powder, shot, wads, and the hundred somethings he required. He telegraphed to his landlady at Pumpington for a sufficiency of clothes to last for a few days, to be sent up by the evening train; and by the early train the next morning, armed *cap-à-pie*, Sancho and all, he was ready to take the field, which he did with certain results.

"Now, sir," said Tim Farbrace to Crackenthorpe; "this way, through they swedes; our beat begins here."

"Oh, yes; but it's such a nice evening that I should prefer walking out to the further end of the beat first; and perhaps

we can run over it all at one go," replied the master.

"Lor bless yer, sir! that's a long way round; besides, I knows there's birds here. Hie in, Nell," said the man, who had already got Nell from a cottage hard by, and here Nell began to draw. "Dang the dorg! blow'd if she won't have all the birds in the country afore her before long; steady, bitch, steady!" as a small covey rose.

"I should like to see the other side of the country," said Tom, putting his hand into his pocket, and lighting a regalia, without moving.

As it seemed clear to Mr. Farbrace that nothing now was to be done, he turned sulky, whistled Nell off, and returned to the road.

"Now, then, which way?" said Crackenthorpe.

"Oh! whichever way you likes, in course, sir; that's ourn, all along here; anywheres as you like; dang the dorg! come in;" and here he gave her a kick.

In fact, as the keeper became more and

more sulky, Crackenthorpe became more and more determined; and, having now reached the furthest limit, he turned straight into a very likely-looking piece of clover. "Now, then, let the bitch hunt," said he.

"No offence, sir, but master don't quite like us to go into that clover; you see, it 'ud be different if you was already the—the—if you had the shooting, I mean, sir;" and here Mr. Farbrace looked spiteful as well as sulky. But it was no use to hang back, for by this time Crackenthorpe was well into the clover, already wet with the evening dew.

I need hardly say that not a bird could be found. Nell was to-hoed and so-hoed, and cursed and praised alternately, but Nell could not make birds; and as Farbrace had sent as many as he could on to the other beat, there was nothing to be hoped for until the present performance was got through. Crackenthorpe persevered, with a face now radiant with hope, now wandering into doubt, at last settling into despair; Tim Farbrace cursing first his luck, then

his dog, then the weather, and then the poachers; but he "knowed what it was—that fellow Thistledown had been driving them;" and "it worn't no use a going on to-night;" while Mr. Crackenthorpe got more cheerful as he realised the situation, and merely determined that he would not take the shooting at any price—"Why, you know there isn't a partridge in it."

"Well, I know there was some not an hour ago." This was true, for he had driven them out. And so on they walked, Mr. Crackenthorpe stopping occasionally to light a regalia, and on one occasion to turn some stones out of his boots. He had nearly exhausted his patience, when a proposal of some coolness checked him for a moment, to which, after some consideration, he assented.

"You don't seem altogether satisfied, sir; but I think, if you'll wait till to-morrow mornin', I can show you as good a bit of sport as you or any other man has got;" and here he turned on one side to let the proposal take its chance.

To-morrow, thought Tom. That's a day lost, I suppose. However, being here, and having nothing to do, suppose I give him the trial. "Can I have a bed at the cottage?" The surly keeper didn't "know as he couldn't." "But what am I to do for a gun?" The keeper, finding his prospects better, thought as he "know'd where he could borrow one." Having got thus far, Crackenthorpe made up his mind to forego the pleasures of decent living for a night, and see the other side of the field, and the adventure. He ate some poached eggs and bacon—a thing he hated; and read *The Field* from beginning to end—angling and all; and naturally fell asleep.

Meantime Bobby Munster arrived at the Axall Station the next morning, just as Crackenthorpe and Tim Farbrace were departing on their excursion; and, as Tim had made a successful foray upon his neighbour's turnips, and driven in some half-dozen coveys or so, he had no fears for the result, and started in high fettle. But "there is many a slip between the cup and

the lip;" and a little telegram having reached Mr. Thistledown about 7 a.m. to have all things in readiness for the stock-broker, who had changed his mind, he did what every rational man would do. He preferred his own interests to those of his friend, and went and drove back all his own birds, which had been lent to be shot at, and a few more original coveys which really belonged to the invaluable manor of Cut-purse and Company. The consequence of this new arrangement was another walk for Crackenthorpe, and a fresh disappointment for Tim Farbrace. Not a bird was to be found. It must be admitted that it was a villanous day. A fog, like a cold blanket, wrapped all things, vegetable and animal, in its icy folds. The sun endeavoured to dissipate it, but utterly failed; and by ten o'clock Cracks had walked about seven miles, had had two shots, and killed nothing: and the keeper's sulkiness had arrived at a most formidable pitch. Like a rat in a corner, he had lost all hope, and assumed the boldness of despair. Cracks had just

begun to debate within himself whether he should abandon the field at once, and seek shelter in dry boots and socks and the next train, when they were startled by a shot not far from them—audible, but in the fog not visible. At the same moment a coarse, overgrown pointer rushed straight into the first covey they had seen, in full pursuit, right through *their turnips*, in chase of a hare.

"Oh! I'm darned," said Mr. Farbrace. "Here, give us your gun, sir; that's the way the birds is druv;" and, seizing the gun at once out of Crackenthorpe's hand, he let fly at the dog. It was too far to have killed the intruder outright; but it so far recalled him to himself, that he seated himself at once, and gave vent to a succession of dismal howls—turning and twisting about for the best part of a minute, as Farbrace said, "as if he had been shot." And then away he went as hard as his legs could carry him.

"Sarve him right, he's always a-poaching."

At this instant, looming through the fog, came the respectable owner in angry search —"Confound it, sir! what are you doing on my land?" said Mr. Munster, rather doubtful whether he was not trespassing.

"Why, Munster!"

"What, Tom!"

"What in the world brought you here?" said Tom Crackenthorpe, beginning to calculate.

"Why, the rail to be sure," replied Bob, thunderstruck; "but have you seen my old dog? he came right across here, and I've lost him in the fog."

"Yes, Bobby," said Tom; "I'm sorry to say we have seen your old dog, and, what's more, we've—we've shot him!"

The explanations deserve another chapter.

CHAPTER XII.

A FIND AND A KILL.

As the charge that had been lodged against Sancho was really a serious one, it is almost needless to say that he did not show himself again in the same neighbourhood. Like other prudent persons who are wanted, he stayed away. His fate was a not uncommon one. He was found by an irascible farmer in a hedge-row about fifteen miles off, who was about to give him up to the halter as a probable sheep-stealer. His melancholy condition, however, proved that he was guiltless of eating mutton or anything else, and he took him to his bosom. Like many other useless animals, he was a good trencherman, and did credit to his keep. In a fortnight's time he resumed his wonted appearance of canine insolence and

sleekness, and farmer Breakridge, who was a bit of a sportsman, like a jealous huntsman, kept his find to himself. One bright September morning he took him into some turnips, where he ran up a covey or two, and chased a hare. The farmer's landlord was shooting in the next field; the dog had no more idea of the meaning of "ware fence" than if it had been so much Telegu, and rushed straight on to the Squire's beat; upsetting a valuable young setter which was steadily backing, and taking the point out of the hands of the old dog. This was bad enough for an old-fashioned sportsman proud of his kennels. The birds began to run; the hilarity of Sancho's natural disposition got the better of his acquired sulkiness, and away he went after them. It is needless to add that the Squire did not get a shot, and his covey went away unscathed. Farmer Breakridge looked over the hedge, and seeing the Squire had pretty well made up his mind what to do with the intruder, with a sort of left-handed liberality cried out, "Odd rot 'un! shoot 'un,

shoot 'un, your honour; he ain't worth a brass farden."

"Oh! he's yours, is he, Breakridge? I'm going to."

And as the dog returned after an unsuccessful chase, with his head up in the air, he blundered into a brace of barren birds, one of which fell to the Squire's first barrel, and Sancho himself to the other. That finished him. The Squire was of our opinion, that, as nothing is so charming as a really good dog to shoot over, so in the whole range of miseries nothing equals a brute. What a treat it is, with birds nicely scattered and lying all around you (when you tread stealthily among the very turnip-tops or clover, lest the sound of your foot-fall should wake up your victims), to hear within sixty or seventy yards of you your friend "to-hoing" or "cursing' loudly and deeply, when every oath appears to have a double weight and to be doubly steeped in wickedness! How your soul abhors bad language! how you long to book him "five shillings" for every transgression, afraid

to hallo at him lest you should increase the mischief! Everybody knows this, of course. Yet there are not a hundred good dogs in the world, and they are becoming daily more and more rare.

If Bobby Munster had known when he was well off, he would have wanted no explanation of Tim Farbrace, except perhaps as to the certainty that Sancho was no more. By the way, nothing spoils business so much as an explanation; nothing puts a man out so much as the necessity of justifying his conduct, good, bad, or indifferent. If good, why in the world cannot the world see it and appreciate it? It's like explaining a *bon mot*. If bad, the subject matter won't bear it: its like throwing away good money after bad, or building a good house on a rotten foundation. If indifferent, what can it signify? and there's always something to be done with one's breath. A man and his wife may quarrel fifty times a week and be the best friends in the world, become quite intimate again, and in a position to have another serious

bout on the Sunday following; but the moment they begin to explain matters there's an end of true friendship. The explanation debases the thermometer below zero, and they become insensible henceforth to the mutual attractions of their position.

Crackenthorpe and Munster found this to be the case, immediately that they entered upon what was called an explanation. As to Farbrace, he allowed Tom to take the onus of the missing dog entirely on his own innocent shoulders: he only wondered who the "third gent" might be, and how he got there.

"Oh! dash it, Cracks; 'pon my soul; no, I'm ——, I wouldn't have taken 50*l.* for the dog. How in the world I'm to get through the month without him either! The shooting's no use to me without him; it's all I took it for."

And here Bobby Munster, who, if the truth must be told, was not very anxious to quarrel with his friend, thought he had said enough, and waited for an answer. He had a faint idea of an offer of so much

current coin for the departed, which he had generously resolved to decline. He preferred cherishing his grief.

"Took the shooting?" said Tom, with some astonishment, having a shrewd suspicion of the state of the funds. "Why, where in the world did you get it?"

"From the owner, I suppose; it was let to me for a month by Cutpurse of Pluckham Court."

"But I have the refusal of it. I came down yesterday to see it." And Crackenthorpe began to think, bad as it was, he ought not to give it up.

"Oh! nonsense: why, confound it! I tell you he let me have it as part ——," and here he was very near letting out the facts of the case. "In fact, it's paid for."

"Come, Bobby, that's not bad. I think I know you too well to swallow that. Paid for? No, no; you're not so green as all that. Why, there's scarcely a bird on it."

"How the deuce do you know that?"

"Because I've been nearly all over it. Dash it! there go the birds while we've

been making a row here," said Tom, good humouredly, and cocking his gun whilst they flew cheerfully over the fence.

Here Tim Farbrace interposed, assuring them both that the manor was full of birds, but that they had evidently been disturbed.

"Ah!" said he, shading his eyes with his hand, and looking straight into the fog, "pity to-o be-e sure! There they goes again, lots on 'em, right on to Squire Tiffin's land. There's a most o' our birds down in them beans, I know."

"When did they get up? I didn't see any birds."

"No more did I," said both of them at once.

"No," said Mr. Farbrace, with a supercilious laugh, "you gents wasn't a looking, but I see 'em fast enough. That's where they got up—in that green patch o' turmits;" and here he pointed indiscriminately into the distance.

At this moment the sun broke out, clearing up the thick vapour partially, and dis-

covering under its veil a fine country and cheerful landscape.

"Come, Bob, it's no use squabbling here about this beastly shooting; it's so bad that, though you're perfectly welcome to it, I can't conceive how you could be such a fool as to pay for it."

"But I have. I'll tell you all about it by-and-bye."

Bob had almost forgotten Sancho, till recalled to the painful recollection by the keeper's old bitch, who had been wagging her stern, and pottering about the turnips, till she came to a point. "I know'd there was birds," said Farbrace. "To-ho, steady, good bitch; have a care! Now then, gentlemen, here they are; get round her quick. In obedience to which command, Munster, with both barrels ready, and his eyes half out of his head, circumnavigated the stanch old Nell. There was a movement—as Bob thought, an attempt to rise; a considerable rustling of the leaves; and then something brown bounded over the tops of the turnips. Bang! went Bobby

Munster's barrel, and sudden stillness gave evidence of his success as a sportsman.

"Darn'd if you ain't done it now, sir!" said Mr. Farbrace emphatically; and running to the spot, he clapped his foot upon the fluttering bird, as Munster supposed, which was hidden by the green tops, the evidence of a very wet autumn. "Darn'd if you ain't done it! Don't look this way —go on loadin', sir. Lawk a mercy! If he was to know this, I'm blessed if he wouldn't shoot ye."

The keeper, however, to do him justice, did not seem to take it to heart. Munster loaded in silence, and then asked very innocently what it was.

"I don't know what you calls him in your country, but you'd better come and see. I daurn't lift 'un up; I doan't want to have nothin' to do wi' the likes o' he."

And there stood Farbrace still, with his foot on the place.

"Well, what is it?" said Crackenthorpe, approaching like a cat on walnut-shells, expecting a boa-constrictor.

"Well, we calls 'un a fox; but perhaps in your country they calls 'un a rabbit!"

Dies carbone notanda! this was a mistake; and in a country "in the immediate neighbourhood of two packs of hounds." But Cracks and Munster were men of some energy; so the best thing was to get rid of their burden.

"Hadn't we better drag him to the hedge?"

"Lord bless you, sir! it's as much as my life's worth, if I was to be seen; we must bury him here."

And pretty sure of a handsome tip, and no more trouble with his customers, it was astonishing how complaisant Mr. Farbrace became.

"There, gents, just you stay while I fetches something from the cottage, and we'll have him in, in no time."

And away he went.

This little mishap restored peace on the only grounds that can make it lasting—mutual interest and mutual fears. No further inquiries were instituted after Sancho;

and they took the opportunity of the keeper's absence to unbosom themselves to one another. Crackenthorpe was not, as Munster supposed, down with Bingham and Lord Cropperton, but wanted a week or two's shooting before the cottage could be furnished or the stables filled. He had come down to look at it, and found it wanting in every requisite. Bobby delivered a round unvarnished tale, and astonished Cracks.

"Then this is really your shooting, and Cutpurse deducted the rent," said he.

"That's a peculiarity common, however, to all bill-discounters," rejoined Robert Munster; "and the transaction is, at all events, more respectable than old bottles, pictures, or hearthstones, all of which I have had to take, in my time, instead of coin of the realm."

"But not more profitable, Bob! What are you going to do down here? There's scarcely a head of game on the manor. Are you sure Cutpurse is not in with this fellow Farbrace and his mother, who provides the lodging for his tenants?"

This was a not improbable notion of Crackenthorpe's, and worthy of a shrewder person than he.

"Perhaps it may be. I didn't say anything about lodging; I only understood there was a habitable cottage from him."

"Did the agent tell you much about it? He was mighty communicative to me."

"Agent! Oh! I dealt with Cuts himself—infernal old Jew! He never trusts any agent but himself. He's an agent himself—to the devil!"

"But he's gone abroad," said Crackenthorpe, who, however, began to smell a rat, and to wonder what a horsewhipping would cost.

"Is he? then it's this morning by the early boat. But here comes the keeper, at last. What a nuisance this is! I suppose he'll hold his tongue."

And so they buried the fox and their difference about the dog, and resumed their journey in amicable silence.

Tom Crackenthorpe was rather disgusted at the manner in which he had been treated

by Messrs. Cutpurse and Co.; and he conceived that he was justified in taking some means for resenting it. Bobby Munster was not averse to anything that could be suggested. He felt that he had been done in the matter of the birds; and he thought 175*l.* strong interest on the 500*l.* he had been supposed to borrow for six months. It was therefore arranged between them that they would put old Cutpurse in the hole, as far as that gentleman was to be caught by a very civil invitation to shoot his own birds, when an introduction to Mr. Crackenthorpe should take place; and a pleasant alternative of a return of the money, wholly or in part, or a submission to the pump and a general publication of his rascality, might be presented to him. This required some discretion, and could only be managed by Bobby Munster. In the mean time, shooting was a farce, as indeed Tim Farbrace at length admitted, upon a handsome tip to preserve the secret of vulpicide; his own participation making it as desirable for him as for his employers

that they should not be found out. They had just decided upon returning home, when a positive covey settled beneath their noses on the other side of the fence. Human nature could not stand that. There are virtuous men, as well as women, in the world; but no virtue could have resisted such a temptation. Munster was, at half a bound, in the hedge, having surmounted a wide ditch on the taking off-side; and Cracks was preparing to follow, when Mr. Farbrace interfered.

"Can't go there, sir!"

"Why not?" said Munster.

"Cos it ain't our'n," replied the man in authority.

"Oh! come, that won't do. It is ours—at least it must be Cutpurse's. I know it is. We'll make it so. Put your long body into that ditch, and we'll take our chance. Come on, Tom."

And they were soon in the beans, which looked nice and light at the side, and soon became as stiff and as thick as good clay could make them. "Whirr, whirr!" went

the birds on every side; "bang, bang!" went the sportsmen. Very fortunately they were not the best of shots, so that they were spared the trouble of looking about for their game, which is troublesome under the circumstances. Now and then, however, they recovered a stray bird that fell in a rather clearer spot. Still the birds rose; what they couldn't see they heard, as deeper and deeper into the field they got.

"There must be some shooting here on this side," said Bob to himself; "when the beans are cut, they must go to our turnips."

"What, where the fox lies buried?" said Tom, who was quite jovial, considering he was poaching, and knew it.

"Hold hard, Cracks—stoop down! Here's a bald-headed old giant ordering us to surrender. I suppose he's the owner."

And true enough, ten yards off stood a violent gesticulating old gentleman, mopping his bald head, and swearing frightfully at the intruders.

"Come out of that, sir," roared he, smashing among the beans in his excitement.

"Who are you, and what the devil are you doing here? Is this my property, I should like to know, or not?"

"No, it is Mr. Cutpurse's, I believe," said a voice from the beans, where it was unsuccessfully buried as far as concealment was concerned; whilst Tom held his head up, and kept his tongue quiet, as under the orders of the "gentleman to whom the shooting belonged!"

"Mr. Cutpurse is a dirty money-lending blackguard; and I desire to know who you are, that have been poaching here among my beans."

Here the bald head was covered by a wide-awake of portentous dimensions, and a hand was raised, flourishing a formidable stick.

"My name is Munster, sir, the tenant of this shooting; and I beg to endorse your opinion of the scoundrel Cutpurse most cordially." And here no end of birds and one gun went off.

"Will you come out of that, sir, or will you not? I preserve this shooting most

strictly for my most intimate friend, Lord Cropperton."

"Cropperton! My dear sir, I beg you ten thousand pardons. Then I fear we have been trespassing: how can I sufficiently apologise for my inadvertency, and that of my friend Mr. Crackenthorpe?" Bob took the initiative on his own estate.

"Crackenthorpe! Crackenthorpe! Bless me! is that Mr. Crackenthorpe of Pumpington? This is a most fortunate meeting, upon my word." And away went the old gentleman through the beans, laying all before him, to seize the hand of the passive Mr. Thomas Cracks, who stared in the most bewildered manner.

"And you, sir," said he, turning to Mr. Munster; "excuse me if I expressed myself warmly; but Cutpurse is a —— scoundrel; and this *is* my shooting; and you've been deceived, sir. We're both right and we're both wrong. My name is Tiffin. Mr. Crackenthorpe, your father was one of my earliest friends; and how is Mrs. Crackenthorpe? better for her visit to the south-

west coast? But come, gentlemen, luncheon is ready, and my house is not two fields off." And away he strode with an energy which soon made a lane through the beans which he preserved for his best of friends, Lord Cropperton.

Under such favourable auspices it did not take long to get through mutual explanations. Indeed, he was just as ready to forego them as he had been to demand them; and when the hat and stick were hung up in the hall of a very pretty country-house, and the bald head had seated itself at the top of the luncheon-table, a more cheerful, good-humoured old gentleman could scarcely have been met with. It was with great regret that both the adventurers admitted their want of clothes, and the necessity for refusing his kind invitation for the present. But they promised to return after their visit to Lushenham, and tax his hospitality and shooting, with their friends Lord Cropperton and Bingham, at an early date.

When retailing their sport they forgot

to mention the little accident with the fox; and I had almost forgotten to tell the reader that Flora Tiffin was one of the very prettiest girls in that part of the county, and quite attraction enough to the susceptible, without the addition of standing beans.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FEW NEW AQUAINTANCES.

Mr. and Mrs.—I beg pardon, the Rev. Daniel and Mrs. Partington, were taking tea in the Vicarage of Lushenham. I cannot say I am partial to that wholesome meal. I am fond of a large basin of the beverage at certain times, and have drunk it cold, out shooting, without a shudder; but the meal, as accompanied with buttered toast, is horrible. I quite believe in its tendency to scandal; and if not a slow poison to the body, it is so to the mind. I am not partial to beer-drinking after breakfast; but it is a manly dissipation, connected with the University-boat and hot coppers, which tea at 7 p.m. is not. Be that as it may, the Vicar and Mrs. P., as she was

sometimes called, were enjoying that meal as if it had been their last.

"Well, my dear, he's arrived at last," said Daniel, with his mouth full of muffin, spluttering away as he usually did, fast enough to catch a mail train, and almost loud enough to break the window. "He's come down to see how the workmen get on, and he's in such a state of excitement! How he was blowing them up about the stables, and the gable-ends, and all! just what I said, my dear—too much ornament. Yes, Matilda, another cup. Toast. Yes; four horses coming down, and no room to put 'em."

"Stall, I suppose you mean," said Mrs. Partington gravely.

"Stall; well, didn't I say so? Thank you, Josephine. One more lump. Bless me, how the evenings draw in!"

"No, you said room, my dear." But Partington was far a-head of his slowly-moving wife, and went on just as rapidly with his mouth full. "Capital rooms—22 by 18 the drawing-room, and a new marble

chimney-piece in the breakfast-room, where old Simcox used to smoke his pipe of an evening."

"And what sort of a person is your new parishioner, pa, dear?" said Matilda, who presided at the tea-table, and set the fashions in Lushenham.

"Oh! bad style, bad style. Smokes, and all that sort of thing, *you know*." Which they did, about as well as Partington himself. You see he was slightly prejudiced; and a large regalia, a puff of which accidentally went down his throat, made the little man irritable. By the way, he was a little man; a very small man indeed; and his mind was about fitted to his body. He was sharp, brisk, active; with a tawny skin, straight black hair, coal-black eyes, a very long and thin nose, a Newgate fringe, three shirts a-week, and a white stock to match, buckled behind. He was the image of an insolvent Yankee, and had as much vanity as a New-England speculator. He knew everything. He described himself as a first-rate mathematician; and was not Senior

Wrangler or Master of Trinity by the merest accident; indeed, he *preferred* the mastership of a grammar-school in Natal, which he had lately exchanged with a man in the last stage of consumption for the small living of Lushenham. Sharpening the teeth generally tends to blunt the tongue, but Partington talked faster than ever whilst eating, and spluttered over everybody and everything in his anxiety to get the talk all to himself. He was the vulgarest little dog alive. But he had his redeeming points—as who has not?—only at present we have not got to them.

His wife was a totally different person. She was slow to move in body and mind—very fat, heavy, and magnificent. A large plain face, with eyes and hair like the Gorgon, the latter of which was splendid in quantity and colour, and twisted in snake-like folds over her head. She was no beauty; but, in opposition to the mathematician, sported "the classical" in all its severity but none of its taste. Her prevailing characteristics were, a determina-

tion to marry Matilda and Josephine to eligible *partis*, and an intense admiration for her husband, exclusive of his opinions. The African settlement of Dotheboys had thriven, so that the Partingtons were well-to-do people, and kept a "one-horse shay." Matilda and Josephine were the belles of Lushenham — not bad-looking, certainly, and, adopting the fashions of the year before last, they were great authorities with the farmers' and tradesmen's daughters, who saw them at church or elsewhere. They were also taken by the hand by a Lady Bountiful or two in the neighbourhood, and consequently held themselves high; laughed at one another about nothing under an infantry-officer, and much more frequently about the young squires with whom they danced once a year at the Snareborough Hunt Ball. What was stated by the Vicar at his 7 p.m. meal was strictly true. He was the gossip of the country; made it his business to have a finger in every pie; and Tom Crackenthorpe had not been in the village half an hour before

the Vicar had seen him smoke and heard him swear. His wife would have declined this office for herself, and despised it in another; she admired and profited by it in her dear Daniel.

When Crackenthorpe arrived at the château—in other words, at the farm-house—of which he was tenant on a long and repairing lease, he found a young architect, a friend of old Sparkes, had already gone to work in the ornamental line. Nothing could be done without a touch of the mediæval, and the style is expensive, especially when the property is not your own. What made it still worse was, that everything had been done which he did not want, and nothing done which he did. It ought to have been half finished; there was scarcely a room with a floor for himself to sleep in, and not a box or stall for a horse. It seemed as if all young Pinnacle's work had been to make the old part damp, and take away the stairs from the single room he might have slept in. At present it was only rich in gable-ends. The village

Public, however, was available, and they did their best for the new tenant of Boulter's Farm. It was slowly emerging into an ornamental villa of great price—that jolly-looking, old-fashioned farm-house, where Cracks meant to foster the spirit of domestic poetry within him, and a fit of economical respectability more suited to his prospects. He was a great lion during the three days he stayed. He might have been a greater but for a strange coincidence. At this very time a neat little cottage at the far end of the village was being whitewashed, newly papered and painted, and a couple of loose boxes fitted up, for a young widow-lady and her mother. What could have brought them to Lushenham, above all places in the world? Not gaiety, nor love of scenery, nor climate, nor association — for they knew nobody. Perhaps economy, or seclusion, or both. Never mind. They had taken the cottage; they were coming in next month. They had already passed a few days there; and not without comment.

"Most extrornary! most extrornary!" said the Vicar, who did not spell it so, but pronounced it short. "Such a very pretty woman! but I've found out something about her. Curious case — separation — separation — incompatibility of temper. Most distressing thing."

"Do you mean for her, or for us?" said Mrs. Partington, regarding her own girls with a melancholy smile, and thinking of Crackenthorpe at the same time.

"Oh! for her, of course. Nothing to us, my dear; duty to perform; sift the thing to the bottom. Crackenthorpe's going to-morrow; I hear there's a lady in the case. A little of that cold shoulder, my dear."

This was at supper; Mrs. Partington rose majestically.

"My dear Daniel, how can you? before the dear girls too!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A GENERAL INSPECTION.

Time rolled slowly on. It does so when one has a legacy to receive or a house to enter upon. Crackenthorpe ran backwards and forwards from Pumpington to Lushenham to look at his improving property. He superintended the stable department, leaving the chimneys and drainage to those who knew more about them. This was not an unprofitable mode of passing his time, in the absence of Munster, Bingham, Lord Cropperton, and the rest of his friends, who were all shooting. There is no doubt that he threw a little energy and a good deal of beer into the workmen when he inquired so perseveringly after the new mantelpiece, or suggested a slight alteration in the dining-room bow. Pumpington,

too, was happy to see that he was still amongst the paraders at four or five p.m. General Bulrush had not quite given him up as incorrigible; Miss Marian thought he wanted nothing but a little foreign travel to make him quite polished; so he was compelled to a heavy dinner or two. Sparkes was curiously anxious to see him on business which Tom imagined to be settled when the workmen went in. With the girls he was obliged to come to a compromise by mounting the family at a review of the Pumpington Volunteers; their affection had been floating about after him since the ball, on triangular pink papers. A bold man would have affronted it, a coward would have run away from it. Tom was neither, and endured it as well as he could. To confess the truth, there were times when it amused him; and he was not always disinclined for a "spoon." The difficulty was, then, to choose.

About this time accident rendered him more than usually callous to the charms of the Spa. Crackenthorpe had been looking

over a half-finished garden-wall, smoking a regalia as usual, and wondering when the stables would have any doors; solacing his intervals with the contents of a large pewter pot, and thinking it must be nearly time to set out again, if he meant to be in at the old General's dinner, when he heard the sound of a horse's foot, and, looking up, beheld a very pleasant vision of a fair spirit. On a good-looking horse, unmistakably a hunter and not a hack, rode a very pretty woman, rather the sort that Tom admired. She was of fair complexion, good red and white, her colour probably heightened by the exercise, with fine hazel eyes and straight features. Her mouth was full and bold, but clearly enough defined; her hair was light brown and well dressed, not a lock out of place. She wore a hat of the most practical, unromantic shape; and her habit of dark blue was short, plain, and admirably fitted to a rather full form. The lady sat well back on her horse, and held up her head as if she were not ashamed of it; looked at Tom, then at the sky, then patted

and spoke a word to her horse, exhibiting that sort of embarrassment that may be felt, but cannot be described. The horse answered it by shaking his head and putting back his ears; and the vision was gone, not into thin air, but round the corner, towards the newly whitewashed and painted cottage. She was followed by a small groom, whose boots fitted him badly, and who looked less comfortable than his mistress. He rode a class of horse not usually wasted upon 5st. 8lb.; he was a hunter much after the fashion of his fellow, but stronger, and showing symptoms of more work.

"So-o-o!" thought Tom; "so that's the widow that's been expected here so long, and a very pretty woman too. Who or what can she be? She can't be come here hunting with her mother alone; that's impossible. There must be somebody in the background. How, in the name of fortune, can one find out? There goes the postman; perhaps he knows."

The postman was as ignorant and be-

nighted as if he had never been in the village before. Her name was Greystoke, and the old lady was Mrs. Bransby; that was all he knew. "See'd the 'osses out exercizin' in the mornin', when he come with the letters; nice 'osses they was, too." The postman was not averse to talking, but he clearly had nothing to tell. Then he turned to a favourite carpenter, who had been a great participator in Tom's liberality in the matter of public-house beer, and who was just giving a finishing-touch to an angel's trumpet, intended for one of the cornices. The carpenter was a most respectable man in the matter of everything but drink; and delicately hinted that the lady in question might not be quite so good as she ought to be.

"Looks a little queer, sir, don't it; leastways, I don't understand none o' them things."

A bricklayer here winked his eye, intimating that Sawyer was not so innocent as he pretended to be.

"Why, Joe, can't ye tell the gentleman

as she and her mother has been here two or three times a lookin' at the cottage. He knows all about it, sir; he was here the last time the lady was here, and showed her the rooms. You know you did, Joe. But, lauk! there ain't no harm. She's a regular lady, and gave us half-a-crown to drink when she went away."

"How long is she going to stay—do you know that?" said Tom.

"She's got the cottage for three year; they wouldn't do it up and put it in repair for less time than that."

"Well, just go round and tell my groom to come with the dog-cart; it's getting on. Will those stalls be all right by next week?"

"Yes, sir, I'll warrant they will; and you'll be in the house the first of November. It's all warm and dry now; and we'll have some good fires in it next week, and keep 'em up."

The whitewashed cottage had assumed a cheerful appearance. Under a sort of rough cultivation, the luxuriance of the

creepers had been trimmed, the borders had been raked over, the box-edges had been cut, and the ragged-looking lawn shaven. Inside, a new paper or two had given a bright cheerful look to the low, old-fashioned rooms; a warm-coloured carpet, soft and thick, provided against winter; charming little nicnacs, enamels, mosaics, Louis Quatorze patterns, Dresden and Sèvres cups (real or imitation), water-colour sketches, a chromo-lithograph or two, footstools covered with Berlin wool, and some fancifully-bound keepsakes, albums, and Mudie's well-thumbed volumes, proclaimed a few of the tastes of woman. A small dog-whip and collar, a fox's brush neatly handled, a screen covered with sporting subjects from Alken, Herring, and Leech, and a lady-like hunting whip hanging on a nail behind the door, clearly a favourite, gave evidence of more manly occupations. There were no flowers, no work. The room represented the only sitting-room besides the dining-parlour, and there was a piano.

It was a cool evening towards the end of September or beginning of October. The grate was more cheerful for the little fire that burnt in it; the shutters were closed, and the lamp was lit. On one side sat Mrs. Bransby, a portly, dark-eyed, red-faced woman of about sixty. She was very richly dressed; and her stumpy fingers exhibited many and expensive rings. She wore a marvellous cap of many colours; and was warming her feet on the fender. The old lady was nearly asleep; and nodded her head so frightfully, that the particoloured cap and her brown front were considerably out of the perpendicular. Her daughter read the last new novel by the light of the lamp, occasionally interrupting her mother in her occupation by a trivial remark. This was the horsewoman who had presented so charming a picture to our hero, that he went home to Pumpington and broke his idols, the Sparkeses, the Bulrushes, and others, and determined henceforth to worship none but his new divinity.

"Mother," said the divinity, "you'll be

in the fire in a minute, and then we shall have the house burnt down."

"Nonsense, my dear!" replied Mrs. Bransby, once more settling herself and her wig pretty straight in her chair; "I know how to take care of myself. I suppose Miss Partington won't be here to-night; she never comes so late as this."

"It's impossible to say. She has as much curiosity as her father, and as much brass as her mother. How long is this to last, Mrs. Bransby?"

This was said with a curl of the handsome lip, which looked something like irony.

"The game is a good one to play out, and you seem to have some cards in your hand, Miss Lilian."

"Oh, bother Lilian, mother. Call me Kitty; it's much pleasanter for a change; and there's nobody here, that it matters much to be so particular."

"But I want to get into the way of it; and there's no performing in public without plenty of rehearsals. But, Kitty, then,

if you like; I suppose we shall have Mr. Crackenthorpe and his friend back soon, and then the play must begin."

"Don't you think we're playing a bold game, Mrs. Bransby?"

"Not a bit too bold. We're pretty nearly at the end of our string, and the kite won't fly any more without running. Something must be done."

"Won't the money do without the man?" said the younger.

"Of course it will; but how are you to get it?" asked the elder.

"He's fond of play?"

"So are you, more than of work. But marriage is the thing." The widow turned pale. "There's no risk there; and as he comes alone (there are no women in the way) you ought to have a good chance. I think the new character will do. He's fond of a sporting woman, you know, we heard that in town; and I think the new character will suit you well. It's nearly a clear field."

"That old Gorgon of a parson's wife and

her stupid daughter are not worth naming, you think?" And Kitty scarcely looked up.

"She's an artful woman, that Partington, so you must be sure and make friends with her; and as to her ugly daughter, the more you're seen with her the better for you. I wish she'd take to riding."

"I've persuaded her that it's good for her health; and her father intends to indulge her with the white cob. What a couple they'll be!"

"Ring the bell, Kitty—Lilian, I mean. If you don't let me practise your new name, I shall never do it. 'Lilian Greystoke'—that's it—will you ring the bell? Nobody will come to-night, now; so we'll have in the kettle, and finish the evening." And here old Mrs. Bransby kicked off her shoes, and spread herself out, and Mrs. Greystoke rang the bell.

When the water and glasses made their appearance, which they did in a few minutes, the servants were ordered to bed, excepting the lady's confidential maid; and the lovely

widow, having produced something to put into the water, from a cupboard hard by, resumed her story, which had been interrupted, with the additional pleasure of a glass of hot whisky-and-water.

And what had become of Tom Crackenthorpe? He went back disconsolately to Pumpington: after seeing the pretty widow, his female friends became more distasteful than ever. He longed for the 1st of November. Meantime, he saw no means of making the lovely stranger's acquaintance. He could do nothing by remaining where he was. What should he do? Go abroad, and ease his mind and his pocket by a little *rouge-et-noir?* But nothing makes a man so virtuous as love at first sight; and he felt convinced that his widow would not approve of Baden-Baden or Homburg. Should he try the Rhine for a fortnight or three weeks? The very thing: without diverting his mind, those undulating hills and that monotonous scenery might soothe the unhappy Cracks. Alone, too! There was to be no Robert Munster, no *mal-*

àpropos jokes, no irrelevant anecdotes. The Rhine and the widow were to share his meditations.

Before starting, amongst other matters, he must complete his stud. A sale at Boote's Repository was the most opportune thing alive; so, the last day but one before his departure for London on his way to Cologne, he dressed himself with considerable care—I suppose, in consideration of his mistress, who was not to see him—and set out for the Repository at mid-day.

We need not describe a provincial Tattersall's. Everybody round Pumpington knows the red face, round collars, broad-brimmed hat, and bright and light clothing of Mr. Boote. In September there were usually a few studs up, or rather the drafts from a few studs, from the North or the South, but not from the well-known *habitués* of the county. It served to fill up time, and a gap in the stable, if any real information could be got: if not, the proceeding was full of risk. However, Tom's was a jovial turn of mind; and, as he observed,

"it must be an uncommonly bad animal that he couldn't put to some sort of use, with such a fellow as Bobby Munster to bed and board." Upon this principle, he waited until a good-looking horse was brought out, called "Acheron"—because he was so *infernally* bad, his owner afterwards admitted. He was put up: and the case appeared so suspicious, that he was knocked down to Tom, without any opposition, for forty guineas.

"Cheap horse, 'pon my soul!" said Billy Duckworth, who was dressed in a louder pattern than usual, with a bright scarlet neckcloth, and a shirt-collar on which was exhibited a whole steeple-chase—"very cheap—cheap as dirt."

"You shall have him for sixty," said Tom: "there's a bargain; and I'll buy another."

Duckworth seemed in a hurry about something, and looked at his watch.

"Oh, there's lots of time. You'd better ride him. Here, Jim" (we need hardly say that Crackenthorpe was hail fellow well

met with the establishment), "put a saddle on that horse, No. 34—Acheron they call him."

Jim stared, but did not obey with his customary alacrity.

"Now, stupid! what are you staring at?"

Still Jim hesitated, looked knowingly at Tom, and shifted a bundle he held from his left arm to his right.

"Don't you hear? Make haste! Mr. Duckworth is going to have a ride."

"Oh, Mr. Duckworth. Yes, sir. Certainly, sir." And Jim dived into the stable at once.

Duckworth had not intended a display: his costume was a morning pedestrian parade. Being taken unawares, he was weaker than usual; and as the Pumpington swells had now collected in full force round Tom, he had less courage than ever to refuse. Acheron came out so mildly, so quietly, that a more consummate Master of the Horse would have had his suspicions. Billy Duckworth was reassured. After five minutes of careful inspection, Billy prepared to vault into

his seat, "like feathered Mercury." He was fairly down, with his head towards the gateway, and his reins held in that comfortable *négligé* which looks so well in Rotten-row, on a well-bitted cob, or with Mr. Rice, when got up for his Piccadilly lounge. Jim patted Acheron proudly on the neck, when, before an exclamation of the briefest admiration had passed a lip, the horse shot straight up into the air, at the same time putting up his back, and sending Mr. Duckworth on to his, in the middle of the yard. Having done this, he trotted once round the yard, with his head and tail well up, and walked safely into the twelve-stall stable again. In the course of five minutes he performed this conjuring trick three times—until, indeed, there were no more at half-a-crown a head willing to try; and some ignominious chaff took place between Tom Crackenthorpe and his friends as to the value of his purchase. Tom, however, was deaf to all offers—even to a *bonâ fide* 30*l.* from a half-tipsy cornet of dragoons, who would send him to the riding-school.

"No, no," said Tom: "I can't afford to lose money. Besides, I want the horse. I've got a mount for that d—d lawyer, old Cutpurse, at last: it's better than assault and battery, and quite as cheap."

"Beg pardon, sir—I think you're the gentleman as bought our Hacheron?" said a good-looking groom to Tom, as he was moving towards the street.

"I am the fortunate possessor of that seemingly-amiable beast. As I have bought him, perhaps you will tell me something about him."

"Good 'oss, sir—anyhow, for them as can ride him," said the groom, touching his hat, and looking as serious as if he was recommending Tom to go to a charity-sermon on Sunday next.

"And what did you sell him for?" asked Tom, *naïvely* enough.

"Ah! that's just what I want to know. He could jump any mortal thing, and always fit to go; and as to ridin' of him, we'd all got accustomed to bein' chucked off on the road to cover—leastways, exceptin' master

himself. I wanted him to keep him for his friends as he mounts."

"Yes, I see he can kick. Does he do anything else?"

"Well, I have seen him run away; and I think that's the reason master sent him here. But if you don't pull at him, he won't pull at you: if you do, my heye! look out for squalls. He'll go at anything; and he goes like a lion, when he do go."

"Won't refuse?"

"Not he," said the man.

"That will do: there's half-a-crown. He's the very thing for Cutpurse."

CHAPTER XV.

A LITTLE TEA-PARTY AT THE VICARAGE.

Crackenthorpe was gone abroad; nobody knew why, nor have I the slightest conception why everybody does go abroad whenever anything goes wrong. When a man has been jilted he goes abroad: the German waters are full of blighted affections. When a man has outrun the constable, he goes abroad because he can spend more money and get less for it than at home. When some bungling sharper has been detected in a fashionable fraud with a friend's horses, or a gay Lothario with a friend's wife, pending Sir Cresswell Cresswell's interference he goes abroad: and our Continental connexions ought to be much obliged by the preference we give them. But why Crackenthorpe should have taken

it into his head that he could not be happy with Munster, or Cropperton, or Bingham, or with the fiery old Tiffin, whose charming daughter would have delighted to welcome him, I can't say. All I know is, that he was for solitude and the Rhine; and he started after having seen Acheron safely into the hands of his groom, and intrusted him with the secret connected with that "playful little dear."

If Tom expected to escape comment by absence, he was much mistaken; people wondered the more :—

"Sublatum ex oculis, quærimus invidi."

The world had become singularly inquisitive as to his welfare: Pumpington naturally; Sparkes pretended to know all about it; Lord Burleigh himself was not more mysterious. Bulrush was furious, and condescended to count the bottles with the blue seal that had been thrown away upon him. Marian had a quiet little cry, all to herself; and was much relieved by discovering that Amelia Sparkes was just as much in the dark as she. Lushenham was

curious indeed as to his return; and as the Château grew in fair proportions day by day, the owner became an object of tender solicitude—his spiritual to the Vicar, his bodily well-being to the women of the parish.

I before mentioned the cheerful tea-table of the Parsonage, with no great commendation for its bounties. If, however, tea and muffins could be made palatable, it was supposed to be so, by an adjournment of the meal to eight o'clock, and the extension of its hospitality to a few friends. If the dreary monotony of the stable-smelling footboy, in red plush breeches and striped waistcoat, the gritty cake, the aforesaid muffins, and the scalding hay could be relieved, it was to be done by an assemblage such as was to be got together, on occasion, in that cold and new-looking drawing-room. Not that it was cold, nor new; the fashion of everything in it had been so for the last twenty years; but not a thing had been used, not a seat taken out of its place, excepting at these cheerful and economical

periods. Nothing so cheap as conversation. The only people who suffer are the absent, and they know nothing about it; that is, if you abuse them roundly enough: your little suggestive backbitings are very likely to find their way to the subject of them; liberal slander is hard to handle. I've heard of a wart on the nose, a cruel but true accusation, that set a parish in a flame; and I know a lawyer, a most unmitigated robber, who has never heard yet what is in everybody's mouth. The Vicar's parlour was a hot-bed of warts and robberies together.

"Dear me, Daniel! there's Mrs. Bransby and Mrs. Greystoke; it's scarcely eight o'clock yet:" and the two ladies sailed into the room. They were amply skirted, and Mrs. Bransby had done so much to her figure-head, that it quite mystified the beholder, and carried off the attention from other parts of a sufficiently prominent figure. The widow was quite charming; a very handsome light silk dress, few but handsome ornaments, her hair beautifully dressed,

and an easy assured manner, which might be consciousness of superiority, or only the result of high breeding and experience of society.

"What a pleasant evening!" said the widow, taking a seat and entering into conversation with the Vicar, leaving Mrs. Bransby to the captivations of Mrs. Partington and Matilda, who just walked into the room in the rear of the new parishioners. Mrs. Partington, who seemed to foresee some advantages to her girls, from a very pretty woman who kept a brougham and a couple of saddle-horses, was bent on being agreeable. Opening her eyes, therefore, and setting her teeth in a manner that was meant for a smile, she proceeded to do the amiable. She praised the cottage, the horses, and the sweet little groom with the big boots; then she touched on the widow herself *sotto voce*; so young, so interesting, and fond of horse exercise, but no one to ride with her. Oh! the girls —one of the girls would enjoy riding with dear Mrs. Greystoke so; to be sure, the

grey was but a sorry animal, but it might please Mrs. Greystoke. Not the Greystokes of Dorsetshire: oh! another branch. And thus this square-built and square-minded woman condescended to sacrifice her prestige as the most ferocious dragon of the neighbourhood for the sake of a prospective advantage.

Mrs. Bransby was not a lady, and she could not appear one without difficulty. But she knew that, and it gave her an advantage over many people. She knew when to hold her tongue. Her daughter was a consummate actress, and made the most of her powers; the voluble tongue and shallow intellect of the Rev. Daniel Partington had no chance with her at all.

"Horses," said he, "charm'd; lor! yes, know all about 'em, *all* about 'em. African horses, Cape horses, wonderful, never wear shoes, never have contracted feet. Ride: lived on horseback, positively lived there. Mrs. Greystoke will take another cup of tea, Matilda."

"No muffin, thank you," said the widow, "we've only just dined."

"Very fond of riding? charming country to ride in; go anywhere, no gates locked; but you jump over them I suppose, Mrs. Greystoke? famous horsewoman, I hear."

"Not quite so bad as that, Mr. Partington, oh! dear no; almost a novice; but my health is not very good, and I am obliged to take rather violent exercise. One can't run, you know, nor jump, nor play at football or cricket; so we poor women must ride. Masculine, but it can't be helped."

"Masculine! masculine! bless my heart! no, not at all." (Daniel, you are a humbug.) And here the Vicar spluttered all over the room. "Nothing so beautiful as a beautiful woman on a beautiful horse."

"Daniel," said Mrs. Partington with a tone of voice which made him jump with guilty consciousness, "where is Josephine?"

"Josephine? oh! dear me, Josephine? she's gone to fetch Emily Gladwish." The house-bell rang, and the second daughter entered, accompanied by her friend.

Emily Gladwish was a bright, happy-looking girl, with no particular beauty, but

bearing a general impression of dimples and good humour. She apologised for her want of dress, tied her bonnet on the back of her chair, where it rather shocked Mrs. Partington's company manners, and commenced a natural assault upon the cake, which she declared to be very good; and the tea, which she declared to be quite good enough, as she ought to have been in time. "But I stayed to give my father his cup of coffee, so I hope you won't be angry at my keeping Josephine."

Miss Gladwish and the widow looked at one another. The widow felt less comfortable than under the scrutiny of the Rev. Daniel and his family. The girl looked very true, and she was very decidedly good-looking; perhaps the widow saw an unwilling rivalry; Emily Gladwish saw nothing but a pretty woman, whom she did not take upon trust. There were at least three people in that room whose thoughts were employed on one person; and so conscious were they of the fact, that not one of them mentioned the name of

Crackenthorpe. The two Partington girls and Mrs. Greystoke certainly wished to satisfy their curiosity; Miss Gladwish had very little curiosity upon the subject.

"And when do you expect your young neighbour?" at length said Mrs. Bransby, when the urn, and the teapot, and the muffins, and the cake had given place to a frightful sonata by Josephine, which was only to be equalled by an intended bravura by Matilda—"when shall we have young Mr. Crackenthorpe among us, Mr. Partington?"

"The first of November,—I know that for certain; I've seen the servant who is come down, and been into his bed-room and dressing-room. Charming house he's made of it. I asked when he was coming; his horses come next week, four of them and a hack; he's a great hunter—suit you for a neighbour, Mrs. Greystoke."

"Perhaps I may not be so easily pleased with all my neighbours as those I have the pleasure of knowing."

The Vicar felt the compliment; the

widow meant to carry him by a *coup de main*. She ought to have known that she might make an enemy at the same time.

"It's a charming house. Have you seen it, Miss Gladwish?" "No." "No? dear me, odd! There's a room for his wife too; the prettiest little boudoir."

"Wife?" roared all the ladies at once.

"Wife? why, he is not married!" said Mrs. Partington, if possible more feelingly even than the daughters. As the widow knew better, she did not say anything. Her mother bore it with fortitude.

"Indeed he is, I've seen her room: and asked, and they told me she was coming down in the course of the winter. At present she is at Torquay for her health.

"Wife!" said all the women again, as if they were deeply injured; whilst a pious ejaculation found vent from the bosom of Mrs. Partington in the hope that "it was no worse."

The pretty widow and her mother rose to go. It was ten o'clock—past indeed. They never took *anything at all* before re-

tiring; "not a drop, my dear Mrs. Partington, thank you. What a charming voice! Miss Partington must sing to me often through the winter; we are so lonely," said the widow.

"Good night, Miss Gladwish; hope we shall be better acquainted, ma'am," said Mrs. Bransby, dropping a very dignified curtsy. "Lilian, my dear, are you ready?"

"Lilian Greystoke! what a pretty name, and such charming manners!" said the Vicar.

"Quite the lady," said his daughters.

"A little too fond of admiration," said Mrs. Partington.

Emily Gladwish said nothing, but thought the more. "Where have I seen that face?"

Outside of the garden-gate, Lilian *alias* Kitty stopped Mrs. Bransby. "Now, mother, hold up your head, and let's tie your bonnet. What a pack of fools to be sure!"

CHAPTER XVI.

CONTINENTAL.

The old women of both sexes made themselves happy at Lushenham over the foibles of the widow and anticipations of Crackenthorpe. Mrs. Partington shook her head, and grimly smiled, whenever the gentleman or lady were mentioned. The Vicar picked up a new *canard* daily, and sported it upon any festive occasion that fell in his way. Like most talkers, too, he was not remarkable for an adherence to facts—I mean the facts he heard or invented. He usually ornamented on Tuesday what he had hewn out in the rough on Monday; and when, by Thursday, it had received its final polish, like a renovated old coat or a well-trimmed and conditioned screw, it was scarcely recognisable. The widow, however, con-

tinued to ride; made herself agreeable to the young ladies of the neighbourhood, and the middle-aged gentlemen; flattered the weak, and succumbed to the strong. Cracks pursued his course on the salt sea.

That gentleman, the hero of my novel, can scarcely be said to have shared with Ulysses and Dr. Livingstone any peculiar love of adventure. It was not to see and to remark upon foreign shores and manners that he had left those of England; nor with any great anxiety to improve his own. He was gone abroad to indulge a restless feeling, for which he could not well account. Tom was spooney, which is a very different thing from the indulgence of a great passion—by no means a reprehensible folly in a young man, but rather tending to high aspirations and an increase of respectability. Neither was he ignorant of the proverb, though perhaps regardless of its truth, which declares that a change of atmosphere is by no means a change of sentiment. For several hours after leaving London he thought of the widow, and was not far

from returning to town from Dover the selfsame night. A sense of the ridiculous kept him quiet, however; and the next day he was half-reconciled to his trip by the arrival of a very pretty girl with her brother, who was likely to be a *compagnon de voyage* some part of the way. Any doubt as to his final recovery was set at rest soon after embarkation.

There is such a thing as sea-sickness; and an Ostend boat pretty full of passengers was not calculated to allay it. Tom had but little experience of late in these pleasures of continental travel, but hoped to escape all qualms but those of his conscience—in his case, not very severe. He lay down, therefore, in the overstocked cabin allotted to about thirty males, and endeavoured to fall asleep.

No doubt he would have succeeded, but for the vagaries of a fat gentleman above him. There are many remedies sold to the unwary or too wary traveller against this very prevalent malady. Gingerbread was the prevailing idea of the fat gentleman

in the upper berth; and he pressed his nostrum upon his fellow-travellers with considerable liberality. It was not accepted; so he applied it to himself with redoubled vigour.

It is not to be wondered at that, before long, the effects of his remedy, clearly taken either in excess or defect, began to be felt.

"I know I shall be ill," said the fat man, tossing about most unmercifully.

"Oh, no, sir," said the steward, who is usually a comforter under the circumstances. "Lie still, sir—you'll be all right enough."

Another half-hour elapsed, and Tom was dozing.

"I'm sure I shall be ill," said the same gentleman again—"quite sure."

Tom sat up in bed, not quite certain where he was. "Hullo! what are you making a row about in my room? Is that you, Bob? Oh, I beg your pardon," said Tom, recalled to his situation by a tremendous rap on the head from the roof of his

berth—"I beg your pardon;" and he turned round, and sought repose once more.

He had just got rid of the widow, and might be said to have reached his first real sleep, when once more he was roused by the same miserable grumbler.

"I know I shall be ill—I'm sure of it. It's all that gingerbread. Oh, Lord! how could I be such a fool? I shall be sick, I'm quite certain." And here the fat man groaned aloud.

This was more than Tom could stand any longer; so, raising himself as well as he could from his bed, he said, with much determination and coolness—"By heavens, sir, if you're not sick at once, and hold your tongue about it, I'll pull you out of bed, and throw you overboard! That's the third time to-night you've talked about it. Everybody else has been sick this half-hour." He turned on his side, as it was too dark to see the fat man's face; but he got no more sleep that night. All he says is, that he reached Ostend with a frightful appetite, and in excellent cue to enjoy a

trip which he had fully intended should be as miserable as possible.

"And this is Heidelberg!" said Tom to himself, three days later, as he leant over the bridge, smoking an enormous cigar, one of a hundred which he had brought over rolled up in shirts and stowed away in socks, boots, and other parts of a gentleman's wardrobe. It was Sunday afternoon. The bright sunshine was dancing on the river. The castle was frowning from its grim heights on the town and valley below. The populace was dressed in its Sunday clothing. The narrow streets were thronged with a mixed population of aboriginals and strangers, Romanists an Lutherans; and it was difficult to imagine, amidst joyous peals of bells, laughing faces, and bright petticoats, that this was the same holiday as that which we celebrate by a lugubrious and gloomy idleness called decorum. Tom had arrived by the rail one hour before. He had performed his ablutions at the Prinz Karl, and was now deeply buried in thought—of course on the

lovely situation, on the Neckar, the ferocious Tilly, and the misfortunes of the Thirty Years' War. What were the pictures that succeeded each other in Crackenthorpe's mind? Turenne? the chivalry of the Elector? the brutal ferocity of Melac? and the final destruction and ruin of that once-important town and castle? I am inclined to think not. He was at that moment absorbed in the external contemplation of the beautiful landscape before him, in the internal recollection of the smells which pervaded its long, narrow street, the sharpness of its *pavé*, the plainness of its women, the tooth-breaking nature of its language, its absence of soap, and the hideous and grotesque ugliness of its student life. I forgive him for the last.

Did you ever see a German student? Of course, they *are* of all sorts; and yet they are all the same. Pipes, beer, flaxen hair, scarlet, blue, or yellow caps, convey no idea of the individual. *En masse*, they do look something like that. But we smoke pipes at our universities (*proh pudor!*),

and drink beer, and wear hair in all sorts of places, and caps of all shapes and colours, and have adopted the most unmanly and unbecoming habits of mind and body at those celebrated seats of classic learning. Our young men are nearly a disgrace to the British Isles. But they are not quite German students. These latter add to a life which combines the public-house with the nursery and the playground, a great capability for playing with edged tools. They are always alive to questions which they are incapable of understanding; and they have a species of rough courage, which is the offspring of vanity and ignorance, and which only renders them the more disagreeable. Thank Goodness! we have not arrived at that pitch yet in Oxford and Cambridge—a pitch which defiles whoever handles it.

Tom Crackenthorpe was a thorough Englishman, and may be forgiven if he glared at these figures, as they lounged or rolled almost up against him, with a very marked and not pleasant expression of countenance.

He had not been in Heidelberg six hours before he had exchanged looks of mutual defiance with at least twenty of them: looks which said, "I'm an Englishman, you are only a German. I wash every day, you only on Sundays. I smoke regalias, you dirty pipes," and so on. You see Tom was but young; had been at Eton and Christ Church; and was as yet not troubled with brains. He was a good fellow in the main; but he was but mortal, and "*humanum est errare.*"

He had been already nearly an hour occupied in his present amusement: now watching the people, now the clouds in the water. It was evidently a great day: no common Sunday, for the streets appeared to be getting crowded to excess. Tom looked at his watch; it still wanted half-an-hour to the late "table-d'hôte," at which he intended to dine. He was already wishing that he had brought Bobby Munster with him, if only to get what he wanted, and to hear the sound of his native language, when he became aware of the prox-

inity of one of his own sex. He too was leaning over a parapet of the bridge. Englishmen who go abroad together never speak to one another, nor to any one else. An Englishman already abroad sometimes ventures upon so remarkable a solecism. He was an Englishman, that was clear; and of a particular class, better known than trusted. But Tom was not in a mood to be fastidious. Besides which, appearances were rather in favour of the stranger. Let us describe him. He was well made, tall, and good-looking; that is, he had bright eyes, a good-shaped nose, inclining to the hook; good teeth; and hair, whiskers, and moustaches of the light flying cavalry order, as opposed to the heavy, drooping style. His face looked all wings. Everything was brushed back, in the wild manner peculiar to the rollicking and fast, and to the men whose whiskers do not grow the right way.

"Fine view that. No, I don't mean that hideous beast whom you were looking after; I mean the Castle." The hideous beast was

a German student; and the censure woke up a kindly feeling in Tom's breast towards the stranger.

"Yes, the country seems pretty enough," said Tom, in reply: "the Castle's beautiful, perfectly beautiful. But I never saw such a set as these men, with their extraordinary caps and pipes. What in the world are they?"

"They are the students. To-day is a great day with them. The term is over to-night; they have had a large dinner at one o'clock; and this evening the whole place will be full of them;" and here the stranger spat over the bridge into the water.

"You seem to know this place," said Tom again, after a pause. "Is there much to see in it?"

"Well! um! much? No, not much. There's the Castle, of course; and there's the Tun, holds no end of wine, you know; about 300,000 hogsheads—bottles I mean, of course; and St. Peter's Church, where the Elector, or Luther, or some of those fellows, you know, nailed something or

other on the door; and there's the club, and a lot of shops, and the Casino, and—and—and"—here the gentleman, who knew the place so well, came to a break-down.

"Well! I must be off to dinner. Where are you?—at the Prinz Karl?" said Tom.

"No, not exactly. I'm in the town, just going too to have some dinner," said the wild-looking stranger, not desirous of leaving our hero without some further intimacy. "I generally dine about this time." He was *abonné* at a very cheap middle-day table-d'hôte.

"If you like to dine at the Karl, I shall be happy to see you," said Cracks, in a friendly manner, and utterly oblivious of continental manners, which can ask any number of friends to a table-d'hôte with the greatest safety, seeing every man pays for himself.

The stranger accepted the invitation. They dined together, the dinner being *à l'Anglais*; that is, the cheese and green-gages were followed by "braten," which proved to be roast beef; and "calb-fleisch,"

which proved to be roast veal, with stewed prunes. It was all right, however, and went down under the influence of a couple of bottles of *lieb frau-milch*. It naturally went down in the bill, too, to No. 33.

Though the stranger's information on matters of historical interest was limited, his knowledge of student life and haunts was considerable. They climbed the steps of the Castle, and took more wine, more coffee, and smoked a couple of those excellent regalias, for which our friend Carlin was not as yet paid. The demeanour of the students was not improved by the increased rarity of the atmosphere; and they exhibited a lightness and buoyancy of spirit commensurate with the highest elevation. They roared, and swaggered, and embraced, and talked a language in which "beflüchter Englander" occurred pretty often. Considering Crack's knowledge of the language, it is not singular that it was not resented. They grew very bold. Tom's companion, who had lived in half the cheap towns in Germany, declined interpreting. "No,

no!" said that philosopher; "if he gets into a row I must help him out of it, and it will be as well to see whether that's worth while."

A second regalia and more *lieb-frau-milch* made it pretty clear to the stranger that Tom was, at least, well to do in the world.

"What's one to do now?" said Crackenthorpe, as the waning daylight warned them to leave the Castle, when it was getting coolish.

"If you want to see a little German life, I think I can take you to a Gasthaus, a sort of Casino, where we shall have some fun. It's a great house for the students, and the lower class of tradesmen take their wives and daughters there. They drink their schopin of wine and smoke their pipes; and they have music and singing. Not impossible that we may drop in for a dance to-night; Sunday's a great night with them;" and they descended the hill.

In one of the narrow streets leading from the one main thoroughfare of which the town consists they found the place they

sought. To judge by the noise, the fun was fast and furious; and, by the atmosphere, all Heidelberg must have assembled to do honour to the dissolution of University decorum and restraint. The door kept opening and shutting; loud greetings, mutual embraces, interchanges of beer, and snatches of songs, pervaded the passage; and the brilliant illumination of the whole front to the right of the door gave evidence of festivity within. As our two Englishmen approached the tumult was hushed, and they were enabled to catch snatches of a grand oration, delivered in student language, in which the practised ear of the Captain (for such was the rank he assumed to himself) detected Prinz Eugène, the juice of the grape, the beauties of the Rhine, and the Zollverein, as the heads of a luminous discourse. Five silver groschen acted as the "Open sesame" of the inner door, and they found themselves enveloped in impenetrable smoke.

The smoke did not clear off, but when their eyes grew accustomed to it they were

able to see. The room was large, the floor sanded. At one end was a raised daïs for the musicians, or amateur exhibitors, as in the present case. The place was not inelegantly decorated with flowers and laurel-branches; the company was very orderly, but noisy. The landlord, his daughter (a great University beauty), and an assistant or two, continued to bring schopins of wine and flagons of beer almost without intermission, and every side-table was occupied. The centre of the floor was left for the dance, in which, after the late display of oratory, they were about to indulge.

When men have made up their minds to be aggrieved, it does not take long to realize their anticipations. Tom was very soon successful. He and his friend had engaged partners for the next dance—a galop. Tom had selected, with much judgment, considering the amount of smoke, a really good-looking girl. He had commenced operations, and was contemplating a second turn with his partner, when a long-ringleted, moustached student (more

of a student, in fact, than most men) proposed to the young lady to take a "tour" with him. As long as a German woman's wind lasts she is good for a galop. So she with a cheerful smile, and he with a profound obeisance to Tom, departed on their voyage. Tom was too much confounded to speak at first, but when he did it was in broad Saxon, and a word or two which was perfectly intelligible. Ignorant of German casino customs, he gave vent to his full-grown wrath, which he had been hatching ever since his arrival. Explanations were unintelligible, and in five minutes Crackenthorpe was in the thick of a very pretty quarrel. They were just short of blows. The women went back to their seats, the men came to the rescue. The stranger Captain elbowed his way up to Tom's side, and Tom squared his shoulders as if he had been backed by the pick of the London fancy.

"Come on," said Tom.

"Hold hard," said the Captain; "we shall soon get into a row."

"Ein dummer Englander," said the German; "was macht er dann? Hier, Fritz, you speak English."

"Oh! ja, ja," said Fritz, who looked just like the other, only he was brown and the other fair. "Ja, ja, I speak Inglis; damn! Was gibt es? You is my enemy, I like not dis. My friend is Herr Fabricius. You insult my friend. My friend say you are a stupid younker. There, now you understand, Donner-Wetter!"

"Here, tell him, please, what I mean, in German," said Tom, "if you understand English. Tell him he's an impertinent snob, and if the women were not in the room I'd give him an infernal licking at once."

The interpreter stared, and Tom doubled his fists unmistakably.

The Captain interposed: "You tell me the German for 'blackguard,' if you please, or call him one in my name; and make the interpreter understand that if he'll come out I'll break his neck as well as his friend's."

Here the press got greater, and the majority, who all yelled at once, seemed to be getting the best of it. The landlord tried his oratory in three languages: none of them were listened to. Tom made use of his vernacular, the students of theirs, and the Captain appealed alternately to both. A gentleman, a little the *better* for beer, commenced personalities by attempting to remove Tom's hat, which in his wrath he had put on. He was saluted by a clean left-hander, which sent him flying back into the arms of his friends. Then the battle raged furiously: a simultaneous attack was made upon Tom, and, overpowered by numbers, he must have succumbed. Sticks began to appear above the heads of the combatants; the women left the room in dismay; and the end must have been to Tom ignominious retreat or certain death. But he was seconded by a good man. If the Captain could do nothing else he could fight; and the two, with their backs to the wall, had scarcely got a blow, whilst the invaders were only coming up to be knocked

down. However, numbers will tell, and were just beginning to assert their value, when the door opened, and a fresh arrival proclaimed a reinforcement for one side or the other. It was not long before it was decided on which: the ring opened; in a moment affairs assumed a different phase, for a ready delivery by Bobby Munster rolled back the tide of war.

He was accompanied by the very worst-looking bull-terrier that has ever been seen —the ugliest and most bandy-legged. For a moment, as silence ensued, he stood still, ruefully regarding the combatants. The movements, however, began again: again the fallen champion arose; again the crowd pushed on: he could stand no more, but making a grab at the nearest opposition pair of breeches, as their owner turned to fly, he caught hold of something more substantial than cloth. An Englishman is bad enough, but an Englishman and his *bouledogge* is the very devil. The captive halloed, the crowd retreated one upon the other, the dog held on. "Don't dance,"

said Cracks. "Tell him to stand still," said Bob, "or he'll eat him." "Sei ruhig," said the Captain, "bewegen Sie sich nicht" —don't stir, and we'll get him off for you; and with some difficulty having made themselves intelligible, and having got the room to themselves, they proceeded to release the only remaining opponent.

"There, now, sit down," said Crackenthorpe goodnaturedly, beginning to tend the sufferer with as much care as though they had been brothers; "sit down."

"He won't sit down this side of Christmas," said the anonymous Captain in a dogmatic manner. "There'll be a shindy to-morrow; however, it can't be helped. Who's your friend with the dog?"

"Oh! I beg your pardon, Munster; let me introduce you. Captain—ah—ah—Captain" ——

"Stuart," said the anonymous gentleman.

"Captain Stuart, Mr. Munster. How in the world did you come here?"

"Quite accidentally. The shooting was too bad for anything. I thought horse-

whipping old Cutpurse and paying the damages preferable: I called in town, but he was washing himself at Margate. The governor came down handsomely with a couple of hundred, and I thought I'd follow you. I saw your name in the visitors' book at the Prinz Karl, and took a stroll with Billy the Beau. We heard a tremendous shindy here, and turned in. Isn't he a neat 'un?"

Bob, we know, had a turn for something neat in the dog line. The Beau was the most hideous brute in creation, horribly under-jawed, and his nose and face wrinkled all over as if he had been tattooed. He was to the dog-kind what the South Sea Islander is to his fellow-man. He looked at Bob and his friends, and licked his lips unctuously after his last morsel, at the same time rejecting some fragments of cloth.

By degrees the landlord, the landlady, the daughter, the waiter, and two or three more looked in. The wounded man craved the assistance of the ladies, which was gracefully accorded without any inquiry as

to the nature of his wound. Tom, the Captain, Munster, and the Beau were regarded with considerable terror; by means of the Captain it was intimated to them that they might go, and the order was confirmed by two gentlemen in uniform outside. They were for taking forcible possession of the Beau, but thought better of it on seeing his under teeth. They were escorted to their hotel by a guard of honour, and promised an introduction the next morning to the first magistrate of the town.

CHAPTER XVII.

TOM'S INTERESTS ARE WATCHED OVER IN TWO PLACES AT ONCE.

JUSTICE, according to Crackenthorpe and his friends, is exceedingly blind at Heidelberg. Doubtless the dingy, smoke-dried old juge de paix failed to see that knocking a hat off in the case of a student is an assault, but not that knocking down the aggressor, in the case of an Englishman, is highly reprehensible. Bobby Munster and the Captain were manifestly in the wrong in aiding and defending their countryman; but the bravery of the Burschenschaft, who came to the rescue of their brethren in the number of about twelve to one, was an exhibition of patriotism beyond all praise or punishment. The dog was condemned to death unheard, although his master kindly

proposed bringing him face to face with the judge and accusers. "Mersa puppis" his *bark* was drowned, as Tom observed. The police, when ordered to carry the sentence into execution, found him in the landlady's lap, with whom he was on the most intimate terms. He declined to come out; she declined to dismiss him; and the boldest of the Heidelberger Badische Cavalry was afraid to remove him. He could not be shot without some danger to the landlady in his present position, and it gave time for a compromise. The rest of the conspirators were dangling between the fortress at Bruchsal and a heavy fine when an opportune arrival saved them.

The Baron von Weissvogel was superintendent of the railway, ex-officer of the late Grand Duchess Stephanie's Body-guard, wore a long sword and very long moustache, and was altogether a very happy specimen of a late blue-and-silver dragoon. He had married two wives, both Englishwomen, who had brought him a few thousand thalers each, was a professed

admirer of our countrymen and women, and acted on all occasions as a *προξενος* for our nation. The name of the consul went for nothing; the strenuous efforts of Captain Stuart to make himself understood, and his threats of British interference, were unavailing; things were assuming their blackest aspect; all the students were speaking at once; and the seat of the trousers—or, I should say, the place where it once was—was being exhibited, at which the ladies present cried "Shame," when the clatter of spurs and a very military footfall was heard, and the Baron von Weissvogel came to the front.

The Baron winked at the Judge; and a more impressive wink can scarcely be conceived. It first stopped, and then turned, the whole current of judicial oratory. Within half an hour it was discovered that Cracks and Company were strangers to the usages of the Electorate; that the students were excited by the exceptional circumstances of the case; that both parties were right—the English rather more right than

the rest; they were all to embrace, which they did not; the bull-dog, like another great amateur, was to be honoured with a public banquet and collar of the Saxony fleece; and the Baron, and the Judge, Crackenthorpe, Munster, and the Captain, adjourned to the Prinz Karl, and finished several bottles of Rhenish to their better acquaintance, and to the purity of the administration of German justice.

Within three weeks the Baron von Weissvogel married a third wife; and this time it was a German. She was the portionless daughter of the juge de paix.

In the mean time Lushenham was alive. It dragged on an existence considerably more exciting than heretofore. The Box, as it was facetiously called, progressed. The widow herself was here, there, and everywhere. First at the Rectory; then at Farmer Muckleprong's—who was to her establishment a sort of right-hand man, and winked and nodded whenever her name was mentioned; and then at the Sunday-school, where she gave away sixpences to her class,

and struggled with some difficulty through the Catechism.

"That's awful work, mother. I never shall get through that part of the play."

"Nonsense, Kitty—Lilian, I mean; that's the very most necessary bit of all. All the ladies in these parts teach the poor children; at least wherever the curate is a single man. I recollect the squire's daughters at Downies. Bless me! how particular they were about their bonnet on Sunday afternoon; they thought a deal more of it than about going to church. To be sure one couldn't see much of 'em there, in that well of a pew, and the reading-desk was on the other side."

"That's all very well for them, Mrs. Bransby; but I don't want to marry the curate, nor to stand in Mrs. Partington's shoes. It's uncommonly tiring work, being so good. I don't think Daniel's worth the trouble."

"But what a thing it is to have the parson on your side!" said the old lady, looking as if she fully appreciated the appear-

ance of respectability, however indifferent to the reality. "Besides, you see all the neighbours there; and it's quite as well to have made a nest before you begin to sit."

"Don't count your chickens before they're hatched, mother," said the younger lady, who was not wanting in worldly wisdom either, and who was not of so sanguine a temperament as the other. "First, the gentleman's not come, and there's many a slip between the cup and the lip." Here the widow pouted. "And then there's the Miss Partingtons, and Miss Gladwish, and —and—who's that woman that's been looking over the cottage, and ordering this thing and that thing? She was there last week."

"Lor' bless ye! child, it was only his mother."

"Was it? Well, I don't like mothers. They're very wide-awake, you know. You are, Mrs. Bransby, yourself. I don't quite understand that Emily Gladwish either. I

can't make friends with her; and she'd be a bad enemy."

"She's very fond of that old father of her's; make friends with him if you can. I never saw the man you couldn't manage yet. The girl will come after."

Here the dialogue closed. Mrs. Greystoke went for a ride, and her mother to sleep.

"I've seen her! I've seen her!" said Partington one day, making his way into his own drawing-room through lace flounces and tarlatane, in preparation for Mrs. Gaddington's school-feast. September was drawing to a close.

"Seen what, Daniel? what can you mean?" said the Vicar's wife in astonishment, whose mind was at that time dwelling on the widow Greystoke.

"Why, Mrs. Crackenthorpe, to be sure! She's been at the Château, and chosen her room, and arranged the garden, and ordered a work-table. I told you he was married; and now the girls have got those new capes for the winter, and I've gone and ordered a

new side-saddle for old Golumpus. I wish I'd made some inquiries beforehand." Here he groaned aloud.

"Married! Nonsense, Daniel! Young men are not in such a hurry to be married now-a-days. Perhaps it would be quite as well if he was."

CHAPTER XVIII.

NEWS.

There can be no doubt that the Rev. Daniel Partington was right this time. There was a lady looking pretty sharply after the interests of the Box and its tenant. She was neither very young nor very fair, but she was quite good-looking enough to excite some unpleasant rumours in Lushenham. She seemed to come with a sort of authority too. She was mighty particular about a certain little boudoir, and desired the groom, who had at last made the stables ship-shape, and was grooming Acheron, to move her brougham out of that nasty damp place, into the other coach-house. It was done at once. She nodded her feathers with a satisfied look, and ordered some fires to be kept up in the other rooms.

She never went to church, though there was a bed for her to sleep in; and altogether excited considerable speculation in the village. Her bonnets were so pretty, and her dressing so good, that Matilda and Josephine were dying of jealousy. Mrs. Partington thought that all women to be respectable should be moderately fat and moderately ugly. The widow was not uneasy, as Mrs. Bransby had enlightened her as to the probable relationship of the parties; and Daniel, having satisfied himself that "Mrs. Crackenthorpe" meant anything but Mrs. Crackenthorpe, was furious for the honour of his parish. It never occurred to him that Tom might have had a mother.

I said that Emily Gladwish had a father. He was a good-looking hale man, confined to his chair by an accident some years back whilst hunting in Ireland. There was nothing beyond this remarkable about him, but having been a thorough sportsman, and much in the world, his inability to enjoy his former pleasures made him irritable.

Irritability in a healthy cripple is certainly excusable. Some losses and the necessary sale of his commission had rather straitened his circumstances. He lived at Lushenham to be nearer the little property which belonged to him, and which fully sufficed for the wants of himself, his daughter, and his favourite pony Moonshee. He believed nothing equal to the two last. He had a cheerful acquaintance in the neighbourhood, and his greatest pleasure was the Irish melodies as sung by his daughter, and an account of a run as described by a friend.

To him the widow Lilian Greystoke determined upon laying siege. Her particular design was unknown to herself. As to marrying a man old enough to be her father, with a small income and a grown-up daughter, that was impossible. Perhaps she determined upon keeping her hand in—though I take flirtation to be, like swimming, or shooting, or skating, and one or two other feminine exercises, very easily resumed, so long as the practi-

tioner has once been an adept. Or was it that she really wished to conciliate Emily Gladwish through her father? Women easily mistrust one another. They are very quick in detecting antipathy, and not very slow in showing it. But Mrs. Bransby's orders were to be friends with the whole world. She expected the mammon of unrighteousness to shelter her when she should be turned out into the world, with nothing but her character to command respect. So the widow set to work to do her behest; and, all things considered, with tolerable success.

"Greystoke, my dear? Not I; how should I know her?" said Captain Gladwish to his daughter. "What made you think that?"

"I'm sure I've seen her, some years back. You know, dear papa, I never forget faces. I can't think where it was."

"Oh! one might have seen her anywhere. Dare say I have. She seems very pleasant and amiable. You're prejudiced, Emmy."

"I like her much better than I did, but I can't get over the curious—curious—you know what I mean, papa."

"Of course I do—prejudice, that's the word; nothing else in the world."

"But the Vicar's wife has the same sort of feeling about her."

"Then the Vicar's wife is a bigger fool than the Vicar, and that's saying a great deal. It's all prejudice. Women never do like pretty women."

"And men always do. My dear papa, she has some object in coming here, and talking about hunting, because she knows you like it."

"Of course she has: it is because I like it; and very kind it is of her. Have you seen the Partingtons lately?"

"Yesterday."

His daughter said no more, for she thought him getting irritable; and when he was he was apt to be crude in his remarks.

"And is the old grey to be put into condition for Miss Josephine?"

"The Vicar is not so anxious about it as he was."

This was a mild form of negation; and Captain Gladwish knew it.

"Given it up in fact?" said he, pressing the point.

"I think he has; but I really haven't asked him."

"And what does Miss Josephine say about it herself?"

"I haven't asked her; but I don't think she seems much disappointed."

"How's that? I thought it was all arranged that she was to fall at an early opportunity, the first month of the season."

"Papa!"

"Which she very well might do, on the grey, before that time;—that it was to be close to Mr. Crackenthorpe; that he was to be found kneeling over her, bathing her blue eyes, which were to be keeping a look-out through the lashes."

"Papa!"

"Until her cousin, young Muggs, that big Bashi-bazouk sort of fellow, who is to

be down here for the occasion on one of Spavin's screws—"

"Papa, dear, who could have—"

"Why, Partington and his wife to be sure; that's the arrangement, isn't it, Emmy? I suppose the Vicar's wife thinks Mrs. Greystoke might prove a stumbling-block to her imaginations, so she hasn't fallen in love with the widow. How is it none of them are afraid of you?"

"We're such quiet people."

"The silent—hem!—I beg your pardon—'Still water'—you know the rest."

"Do you remember being at Salzburg, about four years back, when we were travelling for—for—" said Emily Gladwish, changing the subject.

"Yes, dear girl; don't be afraid to say it out—with the hope of restoring my shattered frame to something like vigour."

A little, very little blush passed over the Captain's countenance, and Emily got up, went to her father's chair, and put her arms round his neck.

"It was thoughtless and unkind to re-

mind you of it," said she, as she kissed his cheek.

"I'm reminded of it every day, Emmy, and I'll tell you how: by the thousand little offices of love and attention which I receive from you. They would be very dearly purchased even by many a day's hunting and shooting; and it's selfish of me sometimes to regret their loss."

Captain Gladwish was not a bad fellow altogether, you see; but he loved a little self-martyrdom, and its concomitant demonstrations of affection.

"You have made a conquest of the widow yourself, my dear papa," said Miss Gladwish, resuming her seat: "she has been out cub-hunting to-day, and she's coming in this evening to tell you all about it."

"I feel very much flattered, I'm sure."

"And so you ought. And now we'll ring for your coffee, if you like, as you seem to have finished your allowance of sherry; or the widow will be here before you're quite ready for her."

And Emily rang the bell accordingly.

And then the widow came. She looked wonderfully well by candle-light. She was of an age indeed when something undefined became her best, half-colours, lace, bonnet-strings, and artificial light; not but that she looked remarkably well in the most definite of all costumes, a habit and a hat. But everybody knows that a crisp distinct style of dressing, tight collars, and stiff wrists, and a marked colour or pattern, wants youth, clearness of complexion, and the preserved outline of feature; indications of a capability to run into temptation. The widow's was a well-preserved thirty. It required a style of its own; the rounded, the easy, the luxurious: all curves, and fullness, and softness; no outlines at all, no colour, no decision, except of character. She preferred an arm-chair to a straight-backed one; and did not care to exhibit her uprightness, save on horseback. All her postures were in curves, and her characteristics were of the omelette-soufflée kind.

She came alone. She had an instinctive idea that what might be very well at the

Vicarage would not be so acceptable at "The Vine" cottage; that the parson of the parish, after all that education had done for him, was not quite such a gentleman as the ex-dragoon. One of these things was a "vulgar mamma." Mrs. Bransby was nothing very much out of the way at Lushenham Parsonage: probably half the mammas in that family were not unlike her; but she was quite sure that neither Captain Gladwish nor Emily was accustomed to them. So she came alone—as she said, not to see the Captain.

She had determined, too, to be friends with Emily; first, because she felt that Emily was not very well disposed towards her, for some reason or other; secondly, it was her policy to make herself universally popular, knowing that it is almost as difficult to get rid of a friend as to make one; thirdly, because she was a good-natured woman, and no one that knew Emily Gladwish long could help liking her; and, lastly, for some indefinite reason,

on which she had no time to speculate at present.

Permit me, in spite of the critics, to explain a little what Mrs. Greystoke was. She was not an "Anonyma," nor a "pretty horse-breaker," nor any one of those very curious things which seem to be talked about in a language which has no advantage beyond concealing vice, and which affords an opportunity for women to talk on subjects which ought to be a closed book to the mothers and daughters of England. "Slang" is bad enough; "pace" is almost disreputable in a woman; but it is a thousand times better that they should call certain things and persons by their right names, than that they should gloss over startling vices by employing wrong terms. Mrs. Greystoke was not an Anonyma, nor a pretty horse-breaker, but an adventuress. Of course we shall see of what sort.

"Now, Captain Gladwish, I didn't come to see you," said she, nevertheless drawing her chair close to his fauteuil, or semi-reclining couch. "I came to see Miss Glad-

wish, and to see if I could help her to entertain you."

"Ah! then, you did come to see me, Mrs. Greystoke, after all? I feel much flattered by your attention. So you have been out this morning?"

"Yes, and had some sport; I was glad of a ride in this country before the regular season begins. The fences were too blind to trust, this morning, so I didn't do more than canter from cover to cover. We killed two foxes; a brace I am told to call them, if I would be correct; but I really know very little about it."

"Then you've a natural taste for it, or you surely would not have buried yourself in Lushenham." Here the Captain seems to have shut his eyes, and hit rather straighter and harder than he intended.

"Taste! Captain Gladwish, it's a passion. I can't live without horse exercise, and of a violent sort. Indeed, I might almost say, I am ordered to hunt." She meant, of course, by her own instincts. "And you, I hear from our neighbours, used to be so fond of it."

The Captain winced a little, and then replied, "Excessively."

"And how sad to be deprived of such a pleasure!" She saw something in his face which warned her against pursuing the subject, as he replied,

"We learn to put up with almost any affliction, when once incurable;" upon which she turned the subject into a new channel somewhat abruptly.

"Do you know our intended neighbour?"

Captain Gladwish did not answer at once. Either he was thinking over his own last words, or wondering whom she meant, so Emily Gladwish interfered.

"Do you mean the Broadlands people, Mrs. Greystoke?"

"No! I mean my neighbour and yours, who has taken the house known as Simcox Farm."

Emily blushed as she recalled the lady whom her friends the Partingtons declared to be no better than she should be.

"I mean Mr. Crackenthorpe; he's not

come back yet; but I suppose we may expect him immediately."

As it turned out to be Mr. Crackenthorpe of whom Mrs. Greystoke was speaking, Emily's blushes increased. In the present state of the village, the man's name sounded less delicate than that of the woman.

"We hear no news, Mrs. Greystoke," said Captain Gladwish; "but I believe he's a very good sort of young man; plenty of money, and fond of sport."

This is not an uncommon idea of a good sort of young man, by the way; and probably quite as just as most.

"Oh! yes, very rich; a charming *parti*, Miss Gladwish." Emily smiled. "And likely to be very recherché in Lushenham and the neighbourhood. Besides which, Bachelor's Hall, or the Farm, or whatever is the real name of the place, is sure to be full of company; that is, of young men. They've always a hanger-on, or a friend, and no end of acquaintance."

"And is there much difference between the two in such a case?"

"Yes! the acquaintances ride their own horses, and the friend rides the stud."

"That's a very striking difference, Emily, I can tell you," rejoined the Captain. "There's no truer friend in the world than the man that will mount you over such a country as this. It shows the highest confidence in you; not in your honesty, but in your capability—a much rarer quality." Captain Gladwish asked if he might smoke; it was a bad habit, but as an invalid he had been accustomed to it, and he did know ladies who did not object.

"Object?" Mrs. Greystoke preferred it to anything; wished she could smoke herself, she was so fond of the smell. And then they went on talking on indifferent subjects, chiefly connected with horseflesh and hounds; and Emily and her father both thought the widow a very good companion, and very lady-like person. Still Emily wondered where she could have seen her before.

At that moment the door opened, and a sharp-nosed, straight-haired, dark-com-

plexioned head came in. It was about to bolt back again, but halted at a signal from Captain Gladwish. "Come in, Partington; come in, man—only our friend Mrs. Greystoke; come, sit down:" and the Vicar stole back, and, after his head, introduced his whole body.

There was no subject on which they were talking on which the Rev. Daniel Partington could not throw some light; and when they got to Tom Crackenthorpe he was like a Bude. They thought he would shortly be back.

"Oh! dear no; certainly not—certainly not; quite positive; very likely not come at all. Horses going to Germany, or to Tattersall's; outrun the constable sadly. Heard it all; saw the postman this morning, and the outside of the letter; and the stud-groom this afternoon. One of the horses gone up to town already to be shipped, and more to follow to-morrow."

"Bless my heart!" thought the widow; though she did not say so. She pressed her hand, however, to that region to see that it

was all right; and found it so. The intelligence might be true after all, and then —— Ah! then. What a state the Partingtons would be in! As to getting on cheerfully after this announcement, that was impossible. Even the Captain seemed sorry for the loss of a presumed companion, who must have been better than the Vicar himself. Partington had endeavoured to conceal his chagrin, by announcing his own defeat, with what success may be better imagined than described; and Mrs. Greystoke, though doubtful of the truth of this intelligence, determined upon looking after the rumour in the morning. Emily Gladwish alone expressed her regret, which was sincere. She longed for some one in the winter to come in and cheer her father, smoke a cigar with him, and detail the runs and the catastrophes of the day. He was so hard to get out to dinner, from his infirmity, and he had no one within two or three miles who could be expected to be so self-denying as to pass a winter's evening with the sufferer. At an early hour the Vicar, proud of his

charge, under shadow of the night, escorted Mrs. Greystoke to her own home. She apologised for not asking him in: her mother was an early person—not very well. So he took leave of her at her door. He was a shortsighted person, and said nothing to his wife about his walk. It came out afterwards, and then he had some explanation due to Mrs. Partington, for having forgotten to mention it. This grim female hated the widow more.

The invalided Mrs. Bransby was engaged in a hot jorum of rum-punch, which she finished before retiring for the night; and Mrs. Greystoke helped her.

CHAPTER XIX.

WIESBADEN.

Tom Crackenthorpe, Robert Munster, and the newly-discovered Captain Stuart had established their reputation in Heidelberg. They continued to enjoy it, by eating, drinking, and smoking in the most formidable manner, to the delight of the hotel-keepers and the horror of the pious inhabitants, who regarded the English, en masse, as participators in their wickedness. The Baron Von Weissvogel, I am sorry to say, encouraged them in their proceedings, and not unfrequently joined them at the expense of his friend Von Crackendorf. Indeed, that distinguished Britisher was so accustomed to pay for everybody and everything, that he probably felt no uneasiness from it till he found himself a little short of money.

Such a thing is not difficult to remedy when there are funds in reserve. So Tom informed his friend Stuart of his temporary difficulties, with a request to know how to get out of them. It is but right to say that the Captain looked with a little suspicion on this early application, not being clear whether it was to be a loan, under the semblance of kite-flying, or whether it was merely a momentary embarrassment until he could send to England. Before entering into the negociation himself, he resolved to ask the question, and received a most satisfactory answer.

"Money! bless your soul! no. I don't want money, excepting for the moment. I want to go to Wiesbaden; and I want a hundred pounds before I go, which I can't get under a week, if I write to-day. I want to borrow it. I'll pay for it."

"I know a Jew here who sometimes accommodates us: I'll see him to-morrow," said his new ally.

"Now, Schenkengelt, you rascal! how are we to settle this little matter? Be

quick, or I shall try Feuerstein. We want to go to-day."

"Feuerstein, eh? Gott bewahr! he has not got von hundred pounds. But, I tell you vot I shall do: I shall take ten per schent—that is, he shall have ninety pounds; and he shall give me his note of hand now. Is dat good?"

"And what shall I have? half ——?"

"I tell you, Mr. Stuart, you shall have —let me see, you owe me five pounds! You shall pay me two pounds and a-half, and I shall sign you a quittang."

"And where am I to get the two pounds and a-half, as you call it?"

"You shall borrow it of your friend, who gets the ninety."

"And that's your idea of ten per cent.," said Stuart, who was much too great an adept to be done without seeing it. "Mr. Crackenthorpe is to pay you in one week, and you are to have ten pounds: that's five hundred and twenty per cent. Do you know what a spitzbube is?"

"Oh, yes; I've seen 'em in all countries. It gives also English spitzbubes."

This was so home a thrust, that Stuart came to a compromise, by receiving a quittance for his five pound debt, and carried home to Tom Crackenthorpe a heterogeneous mass of all sorts of moneys, which took him three hours to count; and then seemed to be short, by about thirty thalers.

Wiesbaden is a small place in the mountains, where foul water, luxuriant foliage, a prince's hunting-lodge, fine scenery, infirmities, and *rouge et noir*, meet together. Thither, after discharging a bill which included almost everything at the Prinz Karl, our three friends adjourned. They got rooms which looked into a courtyard full of remises, German postboys, and blouses, waiting to be engaged. If I say they were over the public kitchen of the Hotel Schwartzenburg, I have said enough in favour of their warmth: the particular object of our friends seemed to be eating, as any notion of infirmity on the part of

any one of them was absurd. Munster proposed to rise early, and to walk up and down for two hours, listening to a brass band, and drinking foul water out of an eight-ounce tumbler to the tune of slow music; and Tom was for making inquiry after a *chasse au sanglier*, or pig-hunt, as he profanely called it. Captain Stuart had succeeded in borrowing twenty pounds of the hundred, until he should receive his remittances (an indefinite period of repayment), and was busied with a curious card and a pin for a considerable length of time after breakfast, when he adjourned to the kursaal. But Munster was too sleepy when the time came; the pigs were the particular property of the Grand Duke of Wiesbadenhausen, and were not in season; and the Captain was the only one who seemed likely to pursue any object but that of gastronomy. Wiesbaden was as stupid as could be during the day.

The evening shone upon better things. They went to the rooms. All was light, bright, feverish, inside; cool, watery, scent-

bearing without. Tom and his friends tried the inside first.

The hock and champagne had been good at dinner, the latter *bien frappé*, and, as ill-luck would have it, their money was in florins and Napoleons, loose in their breeches pockets. There were Jews, Spaniards, Russians, infidels, and heretics around them: and women whose necks and fingers glittered with stones as hard as their hearts. They sat them down to play daily, nightly, and rose up again to curse and to mourn. They were all cleared out and went away. Some ruined, some to refit, some to economize, and one or two to die. All but one jolly little Spaniard, who broke the bank twice, and walked about as gloomily as a sandboy's donkey (it is not a happy animal, believe me), jingling 30,000 francs in his pockets.

Our friends did the same; and when they had lost all their ready money, they gave it up, with saddened hearts that there was no more to lose.

Then they heard of a steeplechase—a steeplechase to be—in Germany.

"We'll get back our money," said Tom.

"Where's the horse?" said Captain Stuart.

"And where's a fresh relay of rouleaux?" said Bobby.

"I'll order some more," said the good-natured Cracks, and we'll have over Blue Peter, who won so well at Pumpington last year, and we'll give these foreigneering gentlemen a turn; if we don't, why—blow me!"

And he sent for Blue Peter, which accounts for the lying of the postman and the Rev. the Vicar at Lushenham, and we shall see whether he gave the foreigneering gentlemen a turn, before he got back to the Box, and the pretty widow—blow me!

CHAPTER XX.

BLUE PETER IS HOISTED.

Whilst our two friends were enjoying themselves with an *al fresco* sort of life at Wiesbaden, and plunging deeper into the mysteries of trente et quarante and roulette as long as Tom Crackenthorpe found supplies, Lushenham was startled by the surmises of the Vicar in favour of the total bankruptcy of that young man. The only ground on which he based his little innuendoes was the removal of a couple of horses at the very time that their master should have been strengthening his stud. Not that any one would have believed the reverend gentleman, who was remarkable as a gossip; but people are always jumping to conclusions which are opposed to their own wishes. This arises from a laudable

desire to take off the first edge of disappointment. It is clear that the expectation of a gallant Lothario, with an establishment of servants, horses, and hangers-on of all kinds, must be a most acceptable addition to Lushenham village. The Château had already risen from its degradation as a farm-house into a comfortable hunting-box; and the old cowsheds and rough cart-stables had become, under the fostering hands of a mediæval bricklayer, very respectable quarters for a more ambitious animal.

All the women, of course, were disposed to regret any change of plan which should delay the gratification of their curiosity. Amongst the numbers that might naturally be expected, it was very odd if some Jack were not found for every Jenny. The housemaids, cooks, young ladies'-maids, nurse-maids, and scullery-maids, imagined some corresponding piece of furniture in a bachelor's house. The ladies of the village, few in number, appropriated a first-class visitor each to herself. And the tapsters, publicans, butchers, bakers, and robbers of

every kind and degree, knew quite enough about such matters to assure themselves that a golden age of perquisites, over-charges, under-weights, discounts, and double-payments, was about to commence with the new reign of King Crackenthorpe.

"What!" said Jobkins the little saddler, a trifle dearer than Merry or Gordon—"a young gent with nigh ten thousand a-year? Lor! what feathers he must have, to line other people's nestesses with, to be sure!"

One person was exceedingly put out a Lushenham, and that was Billy Drinkwater. I think, with great reason.

Billy Drinkwater was a character. He had lived with his present master ever since his Christchurch career; indeed, it is said that that respectable young man was himself busily engaged in the painting and daubing line, which had something to do with the suspension of Tom's studies; at all events, he ruined the paint. He was a short, bow-legged, red-faced individual, with a very *prononcé* sort of nose, which he blew with portentous blast whenever he

was put out. But whether this was to gain time for the recovery of his temper before going to action, or to take measures for out-manœuvring his adversary, I can't say. He was a sublime hater of all foreigners, and everything connected with them. He regarded them as simple sharks—sent on earth, much as the more ferocious or predatory animals, for the destruction of hosts of minor sharpers and swindlers, who might otherwise have overrun the world; and in their turn to be trodden out, as opportunity might occur, by an avenging Providence, which he called "Briton." He had a decidely bad opinion of women, too. Nothing alarmed him more than the possibility of Tom's falling a victim to the tender passion. He had himself suffered from the inconstancy of *the sex* in early life. We cannot wonder, then, that the orders to bring Blue Peter *viâ* Cologne to Wiesbaden should have rather upset a delicate temper. However, there was nothing else to be done; and, as in all cases, there were one or two consolatory reflections. He would go him-

self, much as he detested all "foreigneering and outlandish doings," to take care of master, who was clearly getting into the hands of the Philistines. He would take the horse; for, notwithstanding a rather short preparation, and a sea-voyage into the bargain, "blow'd if he couldn't beat them foreigneerin' beggars on brewers' grains, upon three legs." The hope of taking in the sharks was a fund of consolation in the midst of his distresses. Behold, then, one fine morning, Billy Drinkwater with Blue Peter, ready for a start, the cynosure of all eyes at the Catherine Docks, where his own legs and his horse's were the subject of discussion to an idle but eloquent audience.

"My hies, Jim! there's legs: ain't a bad-shaped old screw, neither; where's he agoin' to?"

"Emp'rour of Prussia, I should think—only there ain't no crown on the clothin'. Always has a heagle or a crown, mostly both," says Jim.

"Why so—what's that for?"

"Cos he's a himperial bird, you know.

Lord! if he ain't had the hirons, to be sure. What a cripple it is!"

Billy Drinkwater stopped short, looked defiance at the two speakers, pulled out his handkerchief, and blew a terrific blast.

"Now, young Saucebox, let's have none of your impertinence: what have you got to do with *my* horse's legs?"

Here Billy twisted his nose importantly.

"Who said anything about the 'oss's legs?"

"Why, you did; and don't do it again."

"No, I didn't. Just ask Jim if I did." Here the lad pretended penitence.

"Well, then," said Billy, slightly mollified, "what was you talking about?"

"Why, your own, stoopid, to be sure." And, whilst the youngster slipped behind a cab, Billy and his horse were urged forward by the increasing crowd towards the wharf.

As there was nothing more to be done, and but little more to be said, he proceeded to hoist *his Blue Peter*; and, without any other *contretemps* than that of putting his

hind-leg through a bonnet-box, which Billy rather liked, as it belonged to a woman (most bonnets do), and could be easily replaced at about one pound fifteen, they set sail.

It was a warm sunshiny afternoon in October. We get those sort of days on the Continent, when our own climate is all rain, or blight, or easterly wind, and when one shivers up and down the garden in a pea-jacket, should it be necessary to remove your post-prandial cigar from your dining-room fireside. There were still half-a-dozen tables laid on the terrace, outside of the *Speise Saal;* there were the flowers still trailing their long tendrils above and around; there was still the light laughing chorus of half-a-dozen representatives of *la jeune France* and *Les Variétés*, picking the bones off each other's plates, and toasting each other in bumpers of champagne; and there were still our friends Crackenthorpe, Munster, and their new acquaintance Captain Stuart, lounging away their time, and criticising Mademoiselle Adèle and Fraulein

Malchen, and eyeing the scandalous proceedings of the young Baron de la Roche de Stuffenfelsen, who was scarcely conscious that the public gardens could belong to any one but himself and his friends. Within a very few minutes they were joined by Weissvogel, and soon Herr Rittmeister von Choucroute, who was considered one of the most sporting men on the German side of the Rhine.

Stuart was very useful to our hero, it cannot be denied. He was a tolerably good companion at all times; never out of temper; ready to eat anything at any hour, dirt included; had some valuable information always ready on German horse-flesh; and was public interpreter, without which no young man should be trusted alone on the Continent, unless he be thoroughly conversant with the language. It has been my fate to see my countrymen sent to all places but the right; shunted here, there, and everywhere, and eventually lodged in a police-office, for want of a little of the national vernacular. I have seen them

paying four times the value of a bottle of ordinary Rhine wine, and calling it cheap, under the genuine name of "hock." I have seen them insulted, and offering insults to others; disobedient to authority, or so impertinently handled themselves, that it was more than British blood could stand. I have heard them talking about the Consul, and the British Embassy, and the Horse Guards, and the *Times* newspaper (that awful institution), and threatening condign punishment to half the hotels in Germany, in a language utterly incomprehensible. And all this for want of a little perseverance, or the merest rudiments of a modern gentleman's education. All such inconveniences their new acquaintance saved them. Just now he was worth his salt and something more. It will save trouble if I tell the reader that all hitches in the conversation were supplied by the timely assistance of Stuart, who called French, German, and English into the market, for the proper exchange of mutual sentiment.

"Ah! Weissvogel. How do, Ritt-

meister?" These old acquaintances had come from the Cavalry quarters at Mannheim, to be in attendance upon so splendid a patron of sport of all kind as Cracks.

"Just in time for dinner. What wine shall we drink, Baron?"

"By all means, of the best—Marcobrunner '34," said Von Weissvogel, in a curious language of his own.

"What do you say to a bottle of Steinwein, Herr Rittmeister? and, Jasen, put some Champagne in ice. Ah! here comes the dinner." And soon the two barons were hard at work with their knives and forks, but especially with their knives.

"Ask him what horses are going for the steeplechase, Stuart. They say there's an animal that was brought from England, a thoroughbred one, that's to cut down everything; see what you can make of it. His English is almost as bad as my German." The question was asked.

"Yes, yes! I know," said the Rittmeister; "he means Grabuge. He is an excellent horse; he carries 90 kilogrammes.

I remember me his colours, *marron et rouge, tête noire.* He is a fine schimmel pferd; and shall win." Here the Rittmeister wiped his knife on his bread, and swallowed a corner. "But you have a horse, Crackendorf, my friend?"

"Oh! ah! yes," said Cracks, as if he had almost forgotten his existence. "He ought to be here. He's no use against your favourite Crablouse, or whatever his name is."

"No! no! that a pity. Shall we drink to his health? He will be second; that is something: *il recevra les entrées*; that is also something." Here the Rittmeister filled bumpers all round.

"Von Weissvogel, shall we smoke? Take a cigar; and you, Von Choucroute," added Munster, "try one of mine. How is our old friend the Burgomeister, or Juge de Paix."

"Ah! you mean my excellent father-in-law that is to be. For a father-in-law, who retains the money in his own hands, he is always too well. We can but hope, if he

is spared much longer, that it may be to make some more. Providence is good; but I cannot tell." The Baron sighed, and emitted a volume of smoke.

Here a waiter appeared, and told Crackenthorpe that a person arrived from England required to see him at once.

"What's he like, Kellner? Ask him in German, Stuart."

"He says he's short, crooked-legged, straight-haired, and red-nosed."

"That's Billy Drinkwater, then, Bob. I must go to him for a minute or two, and then I'll be back;" and Crackenthorpe went out. He was not long in finding Billy, who was wofully put out; first, because he couldn't make himself intelligible for the last three hours; secondly, because not only the landlord, but his wife and daughters, and half the house, had insisted on seeing the English horse on its arrival —a thing so subversive of Billy's ideas of right, that you would have thought that evil eyes were the rule of the hotel to which his master had attached himself.

"Well, never mind, Drinkwater; it don't much signify here, as long as he's all right after the journey. He fed well, eh? They won't hurt him."

"No," said Billy, "I'll engage they don't; but, lord! sir, you're so unsuspicious. I'm blowed if they wouldn't have physicked him then and there, only somehow he laid hold on one on 'em just above the elbow; and didn't he shake him just!" Here Billy smiled cheerfully.

"Why the deuce didn't you tell 'em to take care?"

"So I did in English. It's my opinion they can't understand any language 'cepting their own, ignorant brutes! All as I could get at first was a great lump o' black bread, which they call 'futter.'"

"Any news from Lushenham?" said Tom.

"Missus came in just as I went out. The rooms is ready; they let in the water they do tell me; but the stables are all right, and that's the great thing. To be sure the parlour do smoke uncommon."

"That's bad," said Tom; "however we must look to it next month. Anything else? Anybody been at the place?"

"Yes, good many, mostly women. They keep up a great interest in you, comin' and goin'."

"Who are they?"

"Oh! there's only four or five on 'em. It ain't many, you know; you can't think how kind they are! One on 'em sent in a cat (Miss Partington that was). 'Capital mouser,' says she; got a collar and all on, with the 'nitials.'"

"Really! Where's the cat now?"

"I don't rightly know. I know where the collar is. There's the widow, too; she's uncommonly attached to the sports of the field. You can't think how glad they'll all be to see you. They'll be uncommon fond o' Mister Munster too."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Tom, wondering why.

"I've told everybody that the horses are all his, and that the house and everything went in his name. Lor'! I knew you, sir;

you'd a been grabb'd in a fortnight. Now, he ain't so soft-headed as all that comes to."

"I'm afraid you havn't enjoyed your trip out here, Drinkwater."

"I came here with an object, sir; though the journey isn't over-pleasant. I came here to rob them foreigners o' some money, and, if Providence will but stand my friend, I think we shall do it."

"I'm glad the horse is all right: and before we go to bed we'll have a talk over the business. He's got a clear week to recover the journey: it's a pretty stiff course, and about four miles to go. They're sure to back something here with an outlandish name; but there isn't money enough in the whole duchy to furnish a decently-sized pocket. We must do the best we can."

Tom then rejoined his friends.

CHAPTER XXI.

PREPARATIONS FOR A START.

The evening was chilly, or beginning to feel so. Adèle and the noisy Frenchmen were gone to the tables; where her eyes looked of the brightest and her cheek of the reddest, but where she made less noise than usual. The musicians, who played through six long courses of dinner, and an interminable dessert of tobacco, had themselves retired, and Tom and his companions ordered a chasse-café, and lit their cigars under cover. They played a game or two at écarté, at which neither the Rittmeister nor Weissvogel was great: and then they got again upon the steeplechase.

Just then Billy Drinkwater put his head into the room.

"Like to see the old 'oss, sir? just done him up."

"Certainly," said Tom, rising with Munster and Stuart, and swallowing his coffee.

"Better bring the other gents too," said Billy with a plenitude of good humour, which rather took his master by surprise, knowing how very particular that individual was on the subject; "better bring them, sir."

"Why so?"

"'Oss looks uncommon bad in the stable, you know, sir; no ways peacocky like. They likes 'em all head and tail: I don't."

"Then why show him in the stable? Keep him till he's had two or three days' rest; just a day or two's walking exercise, nothing more."

"Thought they foreigneering gents might like to back something, p'raps, sir. They won't lay much agin him when he's stood still for a day or two. The 'futter' as they call it, isn't so bad after all."

"There, Baron, what do you think of him?"

The Baron and the Rittmeister meantime were looking him over, with a would-be critical eye, and discussing his points to one another in French and German.

"Legs pretty well?" asked the Baron, with much severity of English.

"Three of 'em," said Billy; "can't say much for the other."

"Mais, mon cher, qu'elles sont joliment *brodées*!" Here Billy blew his nose.

"Yes, yes — he is a very nice horse, Grackendorf; but—but Grabuge!—ah! we shall see."

"What's Grabuge?" inquired Stuart—"English or German bred?"

"Oh! he's an Echte Deutscher, a real German, but we have made him an Englishman," said the Rittmeister.

"Ah! how so?"

"We've cut his tail short—now he's an Englander." This explanation was sufficiently satisfactory. "I shall lay you against your horse, my friend, Gracks."

"Well, I'll take a hundred to twenty," said Tom.

"And I should like half," said Captain Stuart, "unless the Baron will do it twice over."

"Can't afford it," said Crackenthorpe; "but you shall have a pound or two. Well, Baron, is it a bet?" and Tom took out a note-book of oblong form.

"Oh! yes, it's a bet. I shall lay you—what is it? One hundred to twenty against your Peter Blue—no, Blue Peter; that is right." And he drew out a very delicate-looking tablet, where, amongst other memoranda of ball, dinner, parade, and riding-school, he entered a mem. as follows:—

"I bet one hundred francs to twenty francs against Blue Peter for the steeplechase, with Milord von Grackendorf." While, at the same moment Tom Crackenthorpe wrote—"20*l.* to 100*l.* on Blue Peter, for the steeplechase, with Stuffenfelsen."

The little disparity between pounds and francs was overlooked for the time.

The morning of the races at length arrived. The little town was full; and at an early hour the country people came

pouring in. There was a variety of costumes, scarcely credible anywhere but at Smyrna on a market-day. The hats were charming; and indeed headdressing, externally, has arrived at a climax which, we trust, is not more than proportionate to the head-dressing internally of the present day. There was the Leghorn flapper, with a bouquet as big as a cabbage in front; the ordinary pork-pie, with a bunch of scarlet-and-gold the size of a pumpkin behind; the genuine Jack-tar straw, with a splendid knob of damask velvet keeping guard on the top; the clerical dodge in Dunstable, the drab felt billy-cock, and a species of Marie Stuart in black velvet, hung round with white beads in the gayest festoons; and, here and there, one of extraordinary beauty, with a pheasant on one side, a woodcock on the other, and a white bird-of-paradise half-way down the back. The costumes of the men were no less wonderful than those of the ladies; and when one of our sex does make a fool of himself, he does it effectually. Top-boots,

jack-boots, cut-away coats, and metal-buttons were supposed to be the normal condition of the English Milord when on the race-course, and as such gained a vast ascendency over every other costume; full suits of brown knickerbockers and Bartlet boots took second rank as to popularity, and found patrons among the most *recherchés*; whilst white top-coats, with small capes, were daintily interspersed among them, and were supposed to denote the *haute aristocracie* of the Continental ring.

Then it was that Tom was enabled to hedge his hundred to twenty by laying eighty to thirty; and that Stuart, who was to ride, and Munster, and Billy Drinkwater all found flats at about the same odds.

From the time of Blue Peter's arrival he had been steadily improving; and it soon became apparent that he was better out of the stable than in it. The narrative he carried was a very telling one.

"I presume Stuart is duly qualified to ride as a gentleman? the rule is very distinct as to *Edel Leute*," inquired the Hoch-

wohl-ge-boren Herr von Donner-Wetter von Potstausend of Mr. Cracks.

"He's a friend of mine," said Tom, looking revolvers, "and can just ride the weight; I don't know what you mean by *Edel Leute*; but perhaps you'd like to ask him?"

"Oh! a friend of Milord, that is sufficient; let his name be put down."

By the time Tom was out of bed, and had breakfasted, and smoked, the bells were all ringing, the town was astir, and the business of the day was about to begin. The entries were made and paid; no less than ten of them: "100 *francs entrée, moitié forfait, pour chevaux entiers, hongres, et juments de tout pays*," with 3000 francs added. It was a handsome stake to win, and worth the trouble.

Well! scarcely, when we take the whole of it into consideration.

First, every horse was to go to the course in a procession formed by the Burgomaster and the guilds of the town. The start from the Hôtel de Ville was truly magnificent.

Lord Mayor's day was a trifle to it. A tremendous drum-major, length of whiskers and moustache then unknown and unapproached, since achieved by one Crimean hero and three London gents of the great house of Truefitt and Co.; a band of music, a pair of flower-girls, baskets, scissors, and ribbons carried by children of the gymnase; carriage of the worshipful the Burgomaster; many guilds with banners, and each his own band; Grabuge, his owner and rider, blanche, *tête verte*, a rough pea-jacket; Scaramouche, his owner and rider, orange, *tête noire*, a white great-coat; Le Duc-Job, his owner and rider, maroon, *tête noire*, a seal-skin wrapper; La Chatte, her owner and rider, blue, *tête rouge*, a mackintosh; Blue Peter, his owner and rider, *blanche et cerise*, a most approved great-coat, Berlin imitation of Mr. Poole.

Each horse was led by his trainer or groom, and the owners and riders followed in carriages of real regimental cut, postilion, boots, whip, and bugle. Behind the horses, the last of which was Blue Peter,

came another band. On striking immediately in the rear of the playful grey, his hind-legs flew from under him rather unexpectedly, one of which went clean through the big drum, the other into the ophicleide, damaging the player to the extent of a couple of front teeth. With the exception of this little *contretemps*, which could not be rectified without another ass and a dentist, nothing remarkable happened. Then came the officials of the races—clerks of the course, starters, *et id genus omne*, mounted on long-tailed Schimmels; and a body of Wiesbaden cavalry, and the same amount of infantry, closed the procession. It was followed by the populace in a state of speechless wonder. The Grand Duke, hundreds of ladies, and the inhabitants of the town and neighbourhood, reached the Grand Stand in their private carriages, and the sports of the day began.

Why should I delay my reader whilst I attempt to describe the early state of Continental racing?—the ornamental clusters of flowers entwining the pillars of the

Stand; the absence of all that renders a race-course business-like and beastly; the charming costumes of the women; the badly fitting slang of the men; the inferiority of the horses, the mediocrity of the jockeys, excepting where some English stable-boy was put up to show the Germans how to handle a race-horse; the amazement of the people, the *bonhomie* of the aristocracy, and the total ignorance of the manner in which money was to be made, or the object for which horse-racing was invented?

It is sufficient to say that three flat races were already disposed of, in two of which the representatives of England—*nantes in gurgite rari*—a bankrupt hatter from a racing country town, and an insolvent ex-editor of a sporting organ, who had taken to the turf as a means of subsistence—were eminently successful. They had been attended with nothing note-worthy, and the steeplechase was expected with considerable anxiety. Already the first bell had rung, and the company waited for the blast of the trumpet which was to announce their departure.

All the nobility in the world was nearly ready. Baron Blazeau was on Grabuge, a worn-out hunter, probably never more than third-rate; the Baron was full large for his breeches, and, when he took his preliminary gallop, developed his figure behind more than was necessary. The Duc Robert de la Forêt-Noire was in a galloping consumption, but anxious to exhibit his weakness on Scaramouche, who might have been a discharged circus horse, and, as Stuart said, looked and went very like it. The Duke's boots and breeches showed a long interval of badly fitting scarlet stockings. Le Col. von Dummkopf came out on Le Duc-Job, the most impatient of animals, who so far discomposed the Colonel that he was obliged to dismount to have his cap tied on sufficiently tight: in remounting the leg-up was a little too strong, and he tumbled over the other side. La Chatte, a quick-looking mare, of very English cut, slipped off with the Comte whilst—in jockey-fashion—disposing of his mackintosh, and carried him up to the first fence with one arm out of

the coat and the other in it. Mr. Stuart got on Blue Peter with the air of a professional, and took him along in a sort of lurching fashion, which satisfied the Germans with their former favourite, Grabuge. At length they were brought up in line, the trumpet blew a blast, and they were off.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RACE.

I SAID the trumpet blew a blast, and they were off. This is not strictly true. One only went off, and that was the young Duc de la Forêt Noire. Scaramouche was quite unknown in the neighbourhood of Wiesbaden. He had been left there as payment for a debt contracted by a celebrated Milord Anglais, who was a broken-down hairdresser and Dissenting minister. He fell thus into the hands of a Wiesbaden landlord, who was glad enough to get rid of him to the most dashing young officer of the Wiesbaden cavalry. He had a most promising-looking head, thin legs, and a thick tail of considerable length. These gifts of nature, together with a large white patch on his rump, recommended him highly

to the German youth as a charger, hack, and steeplechaser. The young cavalry officer was a bit of a coper in his way, though a small one, and was not long in ascertaining that he had got hold of a circus-horse. He was not particularly disappointed at his discovery. The prancings and dancings of his steed, his reputation as an English-bred horse, and his knowledge of his profession, did not detract from his value when the young Baron von Schnee Sturm went courting or on parade. To be just towards him, he refused more than he was worth, two or three times over, but for one little accident, which cost him dear. He was late for parade almost the first time he rode him. Cantering through one of the principal avenues, at that moment thronged with company, he came upon a brass band playing a favourite waltz. Scaramouche stopped short, and then commenced the most determinedly circular career, strictly in time to the music, and highly to the delight of a crowded audience. Unfortunately the wind of the musicians was excellent, and they

continued to play their favourite tune for a good quarter of an hour, when the music, the horse, and the cornet all shut up together. The immediate result was a good wigging from his colonel and three days' arrest; the more serious consequence was that the lady, who had hitherto admired the youthful cornet and his English charger, happened to be on the parade, and, having a higher sense of the ludicrous than the affectionate, turned her back upon Von Schnee Sturm for ever.

That week he passed into the hands of Duc Robert de la Forêt Noire.

No sooner was the breath gone forth which challenged a start, than Scaramouche, mindful of the old days of Widdicombe, Gomersal, and Waterloo, and imagining that that celebrated battle was about to recommence on the plains of Astley, seized the bit in his teeth, and rushed forward against an imaginary enemy. The career was short, as in days of yore, for, having turned two or three times, and charged again and again within some thirty yards

square, seeing that his rider had forgotten to tumble off (as announced in the original bill), he stopped and *died*. The process is simple enough when the horse and rider are *d'accord*; but in the present case Scaramouche, not understanding his rider's pertinacity, first rolled his orange jacket over and over in the dirt, and then lay down upon him and fell asleep.

The day was hot, and the Duke was an immense favourite with the women, so they all began to cry; and, as Scaramouche lay remarkably still, notwithstanding the shouting and trampling, which very much resembled the sham battle, but for Billy Drinkwater he might have been there now.

"My eye, if it ain't the old 'oss!" exclaimed that worthy man, whose antecedents had been a little mysterious. "I know him now. The trumpeter must blow up another tune, and then he'll come again quite lively."

"Why, Drinkwater, you seem to know the horse," said Bobby Munster. "Was he ever in your hands?"

"Well! not exactly; but I looked after him once for a cousin of mine as was along with Mr. Cooke—him as bought Ducrow's business, you know—and they thought a good deal o' this animal."

"I don't suppose they thought he'd ever be a steeplechaser."

Here the trumpet blew another blast, more fearful than before, and Scaramouche got up again; but, not knowing his country, and missing his old circus acquaintances, he stood still, and allowed his rider to remount him, who came out of the mangle not much flatter but a good deal hotter than when he went in.

Having got together a file of soldiers to stand on each side of the refractory horses, and some officials with stiff collars and drawn swords to see fair play in the rear, after one more tanta-ra-ra on the trumpet, which was not of the Astley pattern, away they went to as good a start as ever was effected, not excepting the memorable Derby of '62, nor some of the still more accom-

plished performances in the Houghton meeting, by the same official.

The women dried their eyes in the excitement of the moment, and the Prussian and Austrian cavalry, who were there to see, drew their swords and waited for further orders.

The first few fences were not large. This kind consideration was intended to give encouragement to the timid, and adhesiveness to the slippy-seated. The feelings of the ladies must be excused, or rather their expression, as the science of steeplechasing was a new feature, and esteemed to be highly dangerous. Continental gentlemen know better now, and, by dint of good training, may arrive hereafter not only at our excellence, but at the same degree of chicanery in everything connected with this noble sport. They still fail in making handicaps, by which the handicapper pockets the stakes, leaving the fortunate winner to have made his money by judicious "milking" or "hedging;" and the stupid dolts are too

honest or too awkward to "put the strings on" over a country.

Well, then, the first fences were negotiated in safety—which is something—the English horse in the rear. Billy Drinkwater was gone in search of victims in consequence of this, but returned sadly crestfallen, with a request that his master or Mr. Munster would get on a fiver for him.

"But where's the ring, Billy?" said the last-named individual, who had quite sufficient confidence in the stable to have put on something for himself.

"Ah! it's all very well to say where's the ring! but I'm blowed if I ever see such a thing; there's no ring, no nothing; not a Welcher to be seen even; it ain't a bit like a steeplechase. But you'd better make haste, sir; there's another on 'em down, and it isn't Blue Peter. Lor! bless me, what a chance for us if the Captin would but give him a fall!"

Just as he spoke Colonel von Dummkopf came down an astonishing buster on the

top of his head, doubling up Comte Potstausend, whom La Chatte had put on to his back at the last fence (a good stiff bit of timber), with the bridle in his hand, and ten thousand little sparks and devils dancing about in his eyes. The Colonel's skull in the pit of his stomach did not appear to agree with his temper. Rescue, however, was at hand; and, though Potstausend literally declined to run after La Chatte for the pleasure of finishing, the Colonel was placed once more upon his horse by a too friendly party, and requested to make up for lost time.

"Go along, Dummkopf, alles ist noch nicht verloren."

The three left in the race were Grabuge, Scaramouche, and Blue Peter: they were now traversing a very extensive market-garden, in which maize, potatoes, crout, and cabbages were conspicuous; and, though still autumn, the ground was as heavy as the sea-shore. The rider of Grabuge, who was evidently proud of his seat (the seat of honour at present), was leading at a pace

which fully accounted for the late mishap, and which proved likely in a field or two to settle the pretensions of the circus-horse.

The Englishman held his own, following steadily in the wake, and anticipating an easy victory. One thing he had already remarked—that the obstacles were unmistakably intended to put you down. The timber was of the very stiffest, and, though the ground was soft enough, there was every probability of trying it. Scaramouche's bolt was shot, and at the next fence Blue Peter ran up to Grabuge. A bit of standing corn which had not been got in only intervened between a double post and rails, which was negotiated at a fly by both, and with eminent success, unless we mention the difficulty with which the Baron got back into his saddle. It was a near go, and gave Peter a good lead.

"Here they come, at last," was the shout from the stand.

"Where? where?" said the people below. "Who's winning?"

"Grabuge," said the foreigners.

"Blue Peter," said the English.

"I'll lay even on Peter; two to one; three to one; anything you like. What odds 'ud *you* like?" said Billy Drinkwater, in a fearful state of excitement, to the ex-King of H——, who was enjoying the scene, and utterly heedless of Billy's liberal offers.

"Lor' bless me! why, you arn't worth a brass farden! What's such a chap as you do at a race meeting? Here, lay agin somethin or other."

Meantime on came the two horses, and within sight of the stand, and the last fence but one from home was the water: it was no size, and only remarkable for the deep mud at the bottom. Blazeau was still up in his stirrups, and had no idea that the race was virtually over—nothing being lost till it's won. But steeplechasing to a fat Baron, not entirely at home in the pig-skin, is a tiring process, especially about the thighs. He began to be sensible of a little weakness. Side by side came the two, and Blue Peter, hard held, gave Grabuge

precedence at the brook. The horse stopped short, and went round; and, had his rider been less particular about the elegance of his jockeyship, which he imagined to be valueless unless he was well forward, he might have gone round too. As it was, he shot clean over his head, plump into the mud, where he exhibited nothing but his legs; whilst Blue Peter, taking it in his stride, came over the last fence an easy winner. Baron Blazeau was fortunately drawn out by his boots before he was quite dead; but the mud that stuck to his colours, and the quantity that filled his mouth, his eyes, and his ears, rendered him deaf to the consolations of his friends, and utterly incapable of acknowledging their timely interference.

Within a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, two more came to the scales—Comte Potstausend, covered with dirt, and on foot; he had lost his cap, one sleeve of his red jacket, and his mare: Dummkopf rode in on the impatient Duc-Job, having been extricated at the loss of one boot.

Then there went up a frightful wail to heaven. Where was the Duc Robert de la Forêt Noire? Where was Scaramouche? Female lamentations were at their height. All the ladies of the little Opéra Comique and the *corps de ballet* were *au désespoir*. Where was the mayor? Where was the doctor? Oceans of champagne for Adèle, Malchen, Auguste, and Berthe. Three were in violent hysterics; the fourth listened to the consolation of Weissvogel, whose intended father-in-law was still at Heidelberg. Meantime the burgomaster, the corporation, the stewards, and one of the bands went in search of the missing noble. They had already traversed a mile of the course, or more, without discovering the object of their search. At length they reached that formidable double which had discomposed the seat of Blazeau. There, within the two rails, they found him; still mounted, and his amiable quadruped sitting mildly on his haunches, impossible to get off, with any hope of preserving the elegance of his boots, or the dryness of his scarlet stockings.

There he sat, holding on by the neck; happy in the consciousness of the sympathy he had excited, unhappy in the uncertainty of how long he had to enjoy it. How to get him out? that was the question.

"Cut it down, of course."

"Of course. Who's got a hatchet?"

They all looked blank at this pertinent question.

"How did you get in there, Duc?"

"Oh! I jumped in."

"Well, then, of course he can jump out."

That's good sound logic.

"Of course he can; but he won't."

"Let's come behind. Here, Corporal Dampfnödel, draw your sword, and go behind; now, not too deep."

But so ungrateful was Scaramouche that he let drive at the corporal, and nearly drew his teeth, unseating the Duc, who was unprepared for such a demonstration.

"Where's the nearest house?" asked the young Duke, in despair.

"*Eine Stunde:* only about three miles: go and get a saw, and call at the grand

stand. Say the Duc is quite safe, and, if they'll send a carriage, he'll come up."

With some difficulty the Duke was persuaded to dismount in the mud, and climb over the rails. He was no sooner there than Scaramouche raised himself on his hind legs, pushed his head out, and with one whisk of his tail was by his side. He had done no harm to anything in his descent, excepting the burgomaster's toe, and the cocked hat of an official, which he took from his head between his teeth, and carried round to the company, at a playful amble; signifying his expectation of a few florins, as a termination to his performance.

"Now, sir," said the clerk of the course, "would you like to receive the stakes in napoleons, or our paper?"

This was addressed to the winner.

"Stakes!" said Stuart, quite overcome with surprise. "Oh! I suppose Mr. Crackenthorpe has arranged all about that; we are to have the stakes, then? Gad, that's odd too; but I should think napoleons would do."

And then they went home to dinner. Such a dinner as Tom gave, to be sure! There were the landlord's daughters, and Bobby Munster, the winner, of course, Weissvogel, the Rittmeister, and all the losers. There is no man gets over a discomfiture so easily as a Frenchman, and before the second glass of champagne the Duc de la Forêt Noire had forgotten his ignominious performance between the posts. He took to himself all the credit that had not fallen naturally to the successful hero, whose health was drunk, and whose victorious brow was crowned with a laurel chaplet, when the evening was far enough advanced. Baron Blazeau, or the Baron of Beef, as he was facetiously called, was quite himself again, and contended that he could have won easily, but for the final mishap at the brook. On this point he became clearer, as the recollection of the mud became less vivid.

"And what have you won, my very good friend Cracks?" inquired Von Choucroute of Tom, as they smoked their cigars

in the midst of a Babel of tongues and an atmosphere of Bremen tobacco.

"What have I won? Well, nothing much excepting the stakes," said Tom, slowly taking out his betting-book. "To be sure, there's that hundred of you, Rittmeister; but Stuart has five-and-twenty of that."

Here the Rittmeister drew out his purse, a long slender-looking affair, not unlike Iago's, and proceeded deliberately to draw the rings.

"No, no! never mind about it now: we shall settle to-morrow. I have twenty pounds to pay to our friend Blazeau here, as I hedged on Grabuge. She's not a bad mare that. How's she bred, Baron?"

Blazeau was at that moment cleaning his plate with his knife.

"Oh! very good blood, full blood; but I have brought the money, as I go away to-morrow to my regiment."

Whilst saying which, he counted out five napoleons on the table, and passed them over to Tom, with a happy confidence,

which at once re-established himself in his own good opinion, if it had ever been shaken by the fact of the loss.

"What's this for?" said Tom, eyeing the pieces.

"My lost wager," said the Rittmeister; again folding up his everlasting purse, and putting it into his pocket, with the assurance that he should not have to pay anything more that night.

"But that's not a hundred pounds, livres, pfunds, sterling," said Tom; "you laid me a hundred pounds to twenty. D—— it, Stuart! make him understand that I'm not going to be done in that way. He must shell out."

With some difficulty Stuart made the Rittmeister comprehend the little difference of opinion and value; but it was quite clear that the astute Von Choucroute either couldn't or wouldn't understand.

"Hundred pounds!" said that indignant German. "Gott bewahr! two years' pay! Grabuge himself is not worth the money."

And here he rose from his seat, and

buttoned his frock-coat tighter than ever over his already tightened purse, to say nothing of preparations for a bolt.

"Bobby, put your back against the door for a moment, whilst we explain. Baron Blazeau, did I bet you twenty francs or twenty pounds on Grabuge to-day?"

The Baron collected his ideas, and was just sensible enough to remember that he had won; so he answered without much hesitation: "Francs? no, pounds to be sure, my friend Mr. Grackendorf; we always bets in pounds."

"Of course we do."

And then ensued a scene of considerable confusion. Every one spoke in his own language, rather above a whisper. The ladies left the room, and the minstrels followed after. The contention was at its height, when Potstausend proposed a compromise.

"If Blazeau would accept francs, would Crackenthorpe accept francs too?"

"No," said Stuart, who was a party concerned.

"I don't want your money," said Tom; "but it's a plant: never mind, Stuart, we'll settle it between us afterwards."

"But I wouldn't be done," said Bobby, "if I were you," who had a great objection to any one else doing his friend but himself.

"Sapriste!" said the Frenchman, who was much more alive to the ways of the world.

"Donner-wetter!" said the Germans, who had never heard of such bloodthirsty backers of horses before. What the Englishmen said, I shouldn't like to repeat; but it ended by a general amnesty, a clinking of glasses, more champagne, and the pocketing of five napoleons, save one, which was handed over to Baron Blazeau. He had sacrificed himself to the Rittmeister, or his love of truth to the occasion.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BLUE PETER HOISTED.

"Where shall we go, or what shall we do, now?" said Bobby Munster, whose abdication of the doorpost left him without any pleasurable excitement.

"Let's go to the rooms. One shy more, and we'll be off for Lushenham the day after to-morrow," suggested Tom.

"But I haven't any money," said Bobby.

"I have no objection," said Stuart; "but you must lend me twenty or thirty until I get a remittance."

"Do you mean francs or napoleons, Stuart?" said Tom Crackenthorpe.

"Well, I meant napoleons."

"Then come to my room, and let us get the stakes. They paid them like men: it's quite a pleasure to race here."

Of course no one ever refuses a gentleman-rider's request for such a trifle; and away they went. Play was fast and furious.

"What have you done?" said Tom, about an hour afterwards.

"They've cleaned me out, by Jove!" said Munster, driving his hand into his empty pocket, and looking quite as happy as usual. To be sure, it wasn't his money.

"And you, Captain?"

"Oh! usual luck. I tried roulette and trente-et-quarante: never had one turn at either. They haven't left me a stiver."

This was strictly true; but they had paid him over between thirty and forty napoleons, which he meant to keep for himself, as long as fortune would allow him.

"Here's a go!" said Bobby.

"Not exactly; for I'll be hanged if I haven't got rid of all mine, and twenty pounds which I borrowed of that bald-headed punter, with the sleepy eyes and the long rake. We must stay here till we

get some more, unless there's something else we can put Blue Peter into."

"I'm afraid there's nothing more to be done in the racing line till next year," said the *soi-disant* Captain.

"Then let's sell Blue Peter," said Bobby; and, considering he didn't belong to him, it was not a bad idea.

"Well, I'm going to bed," said Crackenthorpe, "so good night. They've got their stakes back; but I'll be hanged if we don't have 'em again next year."

The next morning, when Crackenthorpe woke, his feelings were somewhat peculiar, not to say unpleasant. He stretched himself as he sat up in bed, shivered, scratched his head (which was easily done, having no nightcap), and had an indistinct sentiment that there was something wrong. His head ached; and as he looked towards the window, he saw his yesterday's colours—white and cherry—upon a chair-back. There was no great difficulty in recollecting that those colours had been triumphant, and that a considerable stake had

found its way into his pockets; that, dissatisfied with its quarters, it had taken its flight, and was now probably rewarding the honest industry and virtuous enterprise of M. Gorgetout, the lessee of the rooms.

"What a fool I am!" said he, as he kicked off the eider-down pillow, and gave his eyes a final rub—"what a fool I am!" And there was nobody to contradict him, as neither Munster nor Stuart, nor any of his numberless toadies, male or female, occupied the same room. "Upon my soul, it would be the best thing to do to sell old Peter and be off to Lushenham. They must have begun cub-hunting a long time ago: they'll be in the open in another fortnight. I'll go and see how the new house gets on." Here he snatched up a pair of toilette-scissors, and seized his moustaches with the left hand. They had grown during his foreign sojourn. "I'll have these beggars off at once—only fit for cavalry officers among the swells, and swindlers and billiard-markers among what are called the

respectable classes." Here he faltered. "Yet, d—n it! I don't know. 'Pon my soul, they're rather becoming! I wonder what Marian Bulrush or Flora Bingham would think of it. Never mind — here goes!" and, with more than Spartan fortitude, he made a dash at the right side of his nose, with considerable success. It left a large gap; so he completed the havoc. Then he looked for his razor, and just recollected that he had not brought one, and that Bobby Munster's flattery of him was exhibited most unmistakeably in this case by imitation. Billy Drinkwater was as clean-shorn as a new sixpence, so he sent for him.

I know nothing requiring greater moral and physical courage than cutting off what the wearer considers a handsome moustache, at the end of a few weeks. If Tom had conquered the first difficulty, the second assuredly cost him some pain; for he swore most lustily at intervals, and returned the razor to his servant without any complimentary allusions to its excellence. How-

ever, there he was, with his lips well scarified, manifestly made up for England; and he ordered his breakfast with a sort of defiant air, which boded Lushenham by the earliest conveyance and shortest route.

His valiant henchman was soon at his side; but the aspect of the bosom friend to whom you have lent thirty naps., and who has irretrievably got rid of them beyond all chance of repayment, does not increase the appetite for breakfast.

"Munster, have you seen Stuart this morning? I shall be off from this place as soon as I can."

"So shall I," rejoined the other, "as soon as *I* can: I don't suppose the governor thinks me worth taking out of pawn, and I can't go without. It's rather a bore for the landlord. He seems a good-natured sort of fellow, and it's a shame of the governor to victimize him."

This seemed a new light to put it in. And whether Tom Crackenthorpe wished to relieve the landlord or the governor, I can't say; but he said, "Oh! we'll manage.

I'll lend you enough to get to England: we can settle it afterwards. I shall leave Blue Peter behind, and tell Drinkwater to bring the money home, if we can't sell him before to-morrow."

Here Captain Stuart joined them. "The Duc de la Forêt Noire wants Blue Peter. He says he can win a hatfull of coin with him here and in Austria. He's very sweet on the horse."

"He's very welcome to him. Shall you mind telling him so?"

"Not I. What will you take for him?"

"Could he have won very easily yesterday?"

"Well, you know, Grabuge had rather the foot of him; but then Blazeau can't ride like Jim Mason, and so the old horse managed to win."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Crackenthorpe. "Then I'll take a hundred a-n-d fifty."

"Cheap enough, too," added Bobby Munster.

"What am I to do if I can't get more than a hundred and twenty? That's the

price he put it at. You know you've to get him home again. When do you go?" added the Captain, after a thoughtful pause.

"To-night, if I can. I'm sick of this place. I want some hunting."

"Then give me *carte-blanche*, and I'll manage the horse by to-night."

"So much the better; and then I needn't leave Billy Drinkwater behind."

The Captain didn't want Billy's assistance, so he determined on finishing the business that evening.

He took a bottle of wine, excellent Marcobrunner, with the Duke that day, at his hotel. "Then you wouldn't mind giving 150 louis for the horse? He can beat anything in this country, and give three stone to Grabuge. In fact, no weights would ever bring them together."

"You think not, M. le Capitaine? Eh, well! what will you? I must have the horse; and your friend Cracks is inexorable. He will take no less? No!"

"Nothing under. By Jove, no! You

know, its not the correct thing to offer anything less than his price. It wouldn't do. He's a regular Tartar."

"Very good. Here's the money," said the Duc, with a sigh. It was just three times as much as he had ever yet given for a horse.

Just towards the close of day, when Crackenthorpe was about to take his place in the night-train for England, the Captain arrived, his face glowing with honesty and intelligence, and happiness at having got rid of the horse.

"Well, I'm come to say good-bye; and there's the money—130*l.*—to put in the mouth of your sack. I got him to spring ten pounds."

"All right. Good bye, Stuart. I hope we shall see you in England soon. Write us a line, and say the time. We can manage to put you up."

With a light heart and a light purse, consisting of about 20*l.* which he had borrowed, and the proceeds of the Blue Peter transaction, Tom Crackenthorpe started for

England. Nothing could be pleasanter than his prospects at Lushenham; and having arranged his money matters satisfactorily in Paris, by paying his Wiesbaden creditor, he sailed for Dover.

Captain Stuart returned to Heidelberg, having lived about two months on his chance acquaintance of the Neckar Bridge, having borrowed about 40*l.*, and taken a handsome commission of 20*l.* more on his deal with Blue Peter. He thought Crackenthorpe too good to be left, so he laid a happy plan for rejoining his friend at short notice. He looked upon him as a sort of annuity, payable at sight.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOME.

When that sententious philosopher Doctor Samuel Johnson was asked what he liked best in Scotland, he is reported to have answered—"The road back to England." Under ordinary circumstances, I should not myself be lost in admiration at this dictum of the great lexicographer, imagining it to want that necessary qualification for respect, truth. But there are times, places, and circumstances, when turning one's head towards home has a charm for man, quite as great as for any donkey. To be sure, the first consideration is to what sort of a home you are going. If to a scolding wife, half-a-dozen dirty children, an overbearing stud-groom, or a smoky chimney, of course you must have managed badly on your tour to

wish to return. Your home may be between two quarrelsome lawyers, or on the second floor of a powder-mill, or next to a young gentlemen's academy, or in Whitechapel, in which case the road home ought to be uncommonly smooth to make it acceptable, or your temporary absence one of unqualified misery. Now, certainly Tom's little excursion had had no great drawbacks. He had lost neither appetite, nor weight, nor much money. He had not attempted a book, and failed, nor been half-eaten by mosquitoes, nor been mistaken for a Russian spy, nor been drinking the waters; yet he was delighted when he found his head once more set straight for Lushenham, and nothing but the English Channel and one hundred and forty miles between himself and his Box.

There is something exceedingly pleasant in idea, in entering upon a house for the first time. There is a vast accession of importance attached to the situation of a householder and the possession of a vote. There are increased opportunities for the

display of taste in plate-glass, china, and furniture. You can ask a man, and not only a man, but a woman, to be your guest. You have a status in society, which never belongs to lodgings or chambers; and, especially in your parish, when you may become overseer, churchwarden, mayor, secretary of the coal-club, and God knows what besides, if of a peaceful, or religious, or political turn of mind; or a captain of militia, or subscriber to the county hounds, or seconder to the Tory candidate, or master to a pack of harriers, if of warlike or sporting bias—things never yet heard of in the inhabitants of a two-pair-back. There's registration, and the water-rates, and the poor-rates, and the house and land tax, and the stocking of cellar, and the pew in church—all of which add immensely to the respectability, not to say dignity, of the lessee. Then there's the certainty that not a woman within ten miles will be without her curiosity as to one piece of furniture which must be placed there; the knowledge that you are an object of speculation on

good grounds; the doubts as to the propriety of dancing with Mary Jones more than twice in the same evening; and the heavy responsibility of a real entertainment: all these help to make up the sum of happiness to the newly-fledged housekeeper. There's the nice little dinner, which is sure to be spoilt, and the beer which is out only one fortnight before it ought to have been; and the cook, who is always in love with the rural Blue when she's not too drunk to listen to his caterwauling, and the tile that comes off, and the shindy that goes on; and all the little subscriptions, the village Cricket Club, and the Mechanic Institute, and the Dorcas Society, and the Missionary Fund, and half-a-dozen pleasurable excitements in every parish, so soon as man deserts his bachelor ways, and becomes a householder of the very humblest dimensions.

No wonder that Tom Crackenthorpe turned his head towards home with considerable satisfaction, though it is but fair to add that he knew nothing whatever of

these advantages of housekeeping. He had had a very comfortable month for what would have kept one of the inferior clergy for about a year. He had not made a very successful hit with Blue Peter, considering the expenses. His play, or rather that of his friends, and their bills, were, I may say, a drawback to his schemes of economy; and, as Bobby Munster was once more out of funds, the ready-money share of the Château was to come out of Tom's pocket. Then he had made a valuable acquaintance or two, Captain Stuart especially, as a set-off; and he had got rid of a steeplechase screw, which was not of much value to him —his capabilities were too well known at the Spa. All things considered, it wasn't such bad fun; besides, it was all over; so he lit a choice regalia, and began to think of the new house at Lushenham.

"I wonder what the Château looks like, Munster, now it's finished?"

"Look like?" said Bob. "Why! about half-finished. All those sort of places do, at first. I hope it don't smoke."

"I hope it don't smoke regalias," said Tom, "unless it smokes its own; that fellow Stuart has stumped me."

"Here's one," said Munster in reply, offering him a case with a great deal of liberality.

"Is it a pretty good one?" said Tom.

"I've no doubt it is; at least it's one of your own." And here he turned it over, and dwelt upon the large black vein, with the eye of a connoisseur. There's this to be said of Munster—he disguised neither his necessities nor his mode of supplying them.

"I wonder what sort of a fellow the parson is?" again said Tom.

"Not a long-winded one, I hope," rejoined the other. "Here, steward, bring me a glass of hot brandy-and-water: two glasses; you must have one, Tom."

"I suppose we must have over old Sparkes, and our Pumpington friend. I wonder whether the widow is there still?"

"Certainly; didn't Billy Drinkwater say she was? You'll be carried bodily away

by the woman, Tom. Never was such a chance in a country village."

"You'll run the same risk, Bob. What a fortunate woman she will be that gets you!"

"Well! I am not to be caught with chaff, I can tell you. Mine's a very simple process; and, as I discovered it myself, I take great credit to myself for the invention." Bob looked as if he meant to be asked; so Tom asked him how, in sailing so near the wind, he managed to escape the storm.

"Not difficult at all. Well! they *are* good regalias. When I dance with a girl I know nothing about, I always ask after her brother, as I think I must have been at school with him. So prolific are we English that I seldom meet with any answer but one—'Which do you mean?' This is a spec that must at once be given up. If she says—'It's impossible, as I havn't one,' it's pretty certain that the estate will be divided equally amongst the sisters. Make further in-

quiries; it may turn out well—though I was once rather upset in my investigations."

"How's that?" said Tom, who, albeit not mercenary, did not think the scheme altogether a bad one.

"I got into a family of ten daughters; and, after calculating that they might get fifty pounds a-year each, I found that was entailed on a cousin. However, they managed to keep it in the family. The eldest girl married him outright. But you'll never do. You're too susceptible, Tom, by half, for this wicked world."

"What's the stud consist of, Munster? You always have a wonderful sample or two."

"I must go to Tilbury."

"Why not buy? it's cheaper and more satisfactory."

"Ah! that's all very well; but there's no tick at the Corner; the dealers like their money, and, as to the gentlemen, they're worse than either. They're always hard-up, or they wouldn't sell anything worth having.

Now, I think Tilbury's good till the horses are done with."

"When will that be?" said Tom.

"Oh! at the end of the season, if everything goes right. But if the governor gets nothing, I suppose I must take them on through the summer."

"Mind you don't sell one by accident, because that's very like felony;" and at that moment the steward came round to collect the tickets and the brandy-and-waters. There were hurried *adieux* from those who had travelled a few days together, and were never more to meet in this world; strong determinations on the part of some never to go through so much again; and anticipations on the part of others of another turn next year; the pleasures of memory on the part of a bearded vagabond who had left Paris behind him, and those of hope in the modest little French girl in the corner, who was just consigned to the tender mercies of an English family, where a footman was kept, and the eldest of six children to be committed to her charge

was eight years old, and already a proficient in broad Yorkshire. Amongst the motley crowd Tom and his friend found their way into the mail train.

"What's to be done now, Mrs. Sampson?" said Mr. Taplow, Crackenthorpe's valet, butler, and general in-door agent; "here's the guv'ner a-coming home on the 5th, the very day of our little party."

"Well, I suppose he don't want the whole house, does he? There's room enough for all on us, once in a way." And Mrs. Sampson looked so much defiance that it was evident the tea was stronger than usual that evening. "But how do you know he's coming on the 5th?"

"Mr. Drinkwater's brought a letter. We're to have both the bachelors' rooms ready, and the back room and the boudoir won't be wanted till the 10th."

Here Mr. Drinkwater entered himself, and, after saluting his fellow-servants after his absence, he interposed—

"Yes, Mrs. Sampson, sorry to say it if it

inconveniences you, but them little trials is good for the temper."

Billy delivered himself pompously of this sententious remark; and Mrs. Sampson fired up immediately—

"Temper be blowed, Mr. Drinkwater! Isn't it enough to provoke one, when one has stuffed the beef, and made the sausage-meat, and gone and got everything? Besides, there's lots on 'em coming from Barkby Stoncham. Ah! he can't come home on the 5th, and that's all about it."

"That's all very well," observed Mr. Taplow; "but who's to prevent him?"

"Why, you, to be sure," sung out both at once.

"Tell him the house is burnt down—no! I mean the chimley's on fire—and we've got the sweeps, and none o' the furniture's down in any o' the rooms. Lord! it's easy enough—

'Remember, remember the fifth of November!'"

sang Mrs. Sampson, getting on good terms with herself when she saw that her advice had made an impression. In fact, the plan

seemed feasible enough, after making a suggestion or two; and much easier and pleasanter than going round to put off their guests to a day that might never arrive. So Mr. Taplow undertook to write a line to his master at the Hôtel des Princes, Rue Rivoli, Paris, to beg of him to remain a couple of days longer away, as it was impossible to get the house ready.

This letter would have had the desired effect but for one little circumstance, not uncommon in like cases. The letter never got to the master, and was left kicking about in the dead-letter office in Paris, till an enterprising official, some six months afterwards, forwarded it to Lushenham, when it fell again into the hands of Mr. Taplow, who disposed of it summarily, by roasting it, like Lord Cobham, over a slow fire, whilst he soliloquised—

"Ah! you're a pretty one, ain't you, to turn up now? It's the only time as I ever see our governor in an out-and-out tantrum. My eye! how he pitched into old Joines the carpenter. Poor old Mother Sampson!

I wonder what's become o' the old girl. Ah! drink's the ruin on us all!"

By that time the embers were all burnt out, or, as he observed, the people were all out of church; so he went and drew himself some beer immediately, and forgot the subject for the rest of his life.

It is not in mortals to command success —they can only deserve it; and if industrious care for the attainment of an object has any virtue in it, then the half-dozen servants at Lushenham were very meritorious persons. Mrs. Sampson was indefatigable in baking, and making, and stewing; Mr. Taplow laid his master's cellar under contribution to within an ace of detection; Mary Gibbons, the housemaid, for the first time since her engagement by Mrs. Crackenthorpe, condescended to do some real dusting; and Sally, the kitchenmaid, was in voluntary requisition from morning to night. The guests mainly consisted of some gentlemen's gentlemen from Barkby Stoneham; and, as Thursday was a non-hunting day, and the supper was to take

place on that night, they mustered in full force. There were several eligible parties from among the workmen who had been employed on the house. Joines the carpenter—Joe Joines, and Tom Hodman the mason, both unmarried; that is, Joe Joines's wife had been separated from him judicially for a cause in which a split skull was the principal witness, and a pewter pot the accessory. It made the ferocious Benedict rather a favourite with the women. There was Mrs. Bransby's maid, a young lady choice in her selection of caps and language—both of them had a sort of pink-ribbon flavour; and Mrs. Greystoke's own groom, a gentleman of tender years, great impudence, and much importance, which he derived from the influence of that mysterious personage. The Vicarage furnished a couple of maids, both of whom were supposed to be visiting a sick aunt of one of them, who liked being read to of an evening. Farmer Ball, who lived outside of the village, had sent his shepherd and the man-of-all-work who groomed his hunters and

looked after the pigs. The latter was famous in the neighbourhood for a song, the chorus of which was, "Solomon tells us a different story," and which had gone the round of all the neighbouring publics, to the intense disgust of the parish clerk, who was, however, persuaded to be present on this occasion. And the minor parts were filled by the blacksmith's son—a perfect Vulcan in his amours—and a few helpers and hangers-on always to be found in any number about a sporting neighbourhood. One person only who might have been there was absent. Billy Drinkwater took sweet counsel with himself, and, though he discreetly held his tongue, managed to be absent without offence.

It was very soon known in the village that the new tenant of the Farm was expected home from "foreign parts." It seemed as though the Vicar for once had made a mistake—had been too hasty in the conclusions he drew from the removal of a horse or two. Not only was Billy Drinkwater come back, but with the most unmis-

takable intelligence of Tom Crackenthorpe's intended return. Billy told the butler, as in duty bound; the butler told the clerk; the parish-clerk told the sexton; and the sexton told the whole of the village. The consequence was a great scrimmage.

Let's begin with the Vicar and his family. Mr. Partington was seriously affected. What if Tom should be a most respectable young man after all? — respectable, of course, meant well-to-do in the world. At all events, he must be visited: as a parishioner, whether given to the secular enjoyments of port and sport or not, it would be his duty to call. He had seen nothing of the lady lately, and perhaps bygones had better be bygones. That was the view that charity induced him to take of it. Mamma Partington had her peculiar notions of young men in general, which rather accorded with the Vicar's view of this one in particular. She was by no means willing to abandon hope, though, as the Vicar's right-hand man, it was her duty to discourage profligacy, past, present, and to come. Suppose

she waited, to see what others would do. To be sure, they would get off first; but then she had the inside, next the rails. Matilda and Josephine were both inclined to go for the stakes. There was no animosity on the subject between them, and they would have been glad in most things to have divided; but here was a case in which there could be no dead-heat. So they made up their minds to put forth their powers.

Miss Matilda took to visiting the Vicar's man-of-all-work. The grey was to have some extra corn, more careful grooming, and to be singed over again by the beginning of next week. Jim had a good deal of trenching to do in the garden; but the young lady was liberal of extra beer-money; so Jim got forward, and the old grey carried his tail an inch or two higher. From the bottom drawer of the chest came forth an elaborate hat; not such a chimney-pot as our friend Mrs. Greystoke sported, but a real lady's hat, short in the crown, turned at the sides, with a place for a feather or two, and looking lost without it.

"Ma', dear, come here a moment; what's become of the crimson cockatoo I used to wear last year?"

"Oh, my dear, how should I know? I suppose Josephine had it to wear at Lady Bountiful's school-feast, and forgot to put it back."

Here Matilda opened another drawer, and was happy to find that the crimson cockatoo had not flown away. Another dive into the same mysterious wardrobe produced a skirt, which was immediately started to the village tailor's, with a request that Mr. Shears would call in the morning.

"You know I must have a new body, Ma', dear, and I may as well have one that I can ride in, and that will do for walking as well."

We would willingly draw a veil over the rest of the costume, but that Partington missed a really very good pair of inexpressibles the following week, and found them being *let out*, to accommodate the young lady's proportions.

All this was rather against Josephine's

chance. There is no question that the eldest sister had adopted a start, which was likely to be successful. However, it was no use to repine—no crying over spilled milk; so she set to work to remedy past negligence. She might have been a sportswoman too. It does so happen, however, that like does not always love like; the most piquant persons prefer a little contrariety. All she could do for the present, therefore, was to adopt the sentimental, and trust to chance. Her mother, aware of the value of two strings to one bow, was quite willing to assist. She was undoubtedly the better-looking of the two, and, perhaps her mother's favourite daughter. The old lady saw no rival but one, and that was the widow. She out of the way, it could be a toss-up only which it should be of the two. The man who backed the hare would have laid odds on Matilda; and the gentleman who stood on the tortoise would have backed Josephine at evens. All this, however, was to depend upon Tom's respectability.

Of course, respectability included landed property, or consols. Joseph himself would have had no chance in his every-day suit: as the Viceroy of Egypt he might have been a very Rochester for morality. Everybody knows that vice in a laced doublet is venial, that it is treated in this world with a considerable amount of lenity; we presume because it is so hardly dealt with in the next: and Mrs. Partington was not deficient in charity. It covers a multitude of other people's sins, especially when they are well gilt.

It must be confessed that, if the widow Greystoke had any misgivings, she did not exhibit them. Externally the new arrivals made no difference in her. She was sufficiently charming at all times. Her horses, her headdress, her habit, was all that she desired it should be.

"Mrs. Bransby?"

"My dear?"

"I suppose you know that Mr. Crackenthorpe and his friend are expected on the 5th?"

"So I hear. Those Partingtons are making great preparations."

"The Partingtons are fools. I don't think he's to be caught by fine feathers."

"They make fine birds, Kitty. You havn't forgot the water, dear," said the old lady, regarding her evening tumbler with suspicion.

"I wonder what his friend is like?" said the widow.

"Oh! bother his friend. You'd better leave him to the Partingtons, and stick to the real thing."

There can be no doubt of the excellence of this advice.

"Never you fear, mother. I should like to know whether he likes the dashing, enthusiastic, take-a-lead style of performance; or whether he prefers the timid, bridle-gate, and turnpike-road business?"

"You'll soon see that, I should think, Kitty."

"The former answered exceedingly well for a time, but it's becoming vulgar. And it makes enemies. The admiration man

bestows upon *us* ought never to interfere with that which he lavishes on himself."

"That's out of a play, dear, I'm sure," said Mrs. Bransby, as she finished her brandy-and-water, and prepared for a start, by pulling out some refractory pins, and easing herself of a very elaborate front.

The General Post Office is no better than the rest of the world: it is fearfully given to lying. In consequence of which a letter purporting to be delivered at Lushenham on the afternoon of the 5th of November, lay snugly ensconced in the rural P.O. until the morning of the 6th, when it was delivered with the rest of the correspondence. This is an inconvenience generally: in the present instance, perhaps not, as it would have deprived the reader of a pleasant episode in Mr. Crackenthorpe's career, and established him at Lushenham with as little *éclat* as the inauguration of a new lord mayor.

By seven o'clock the guests were assembled in Tom's new kitchen, and doing justice to the capital cheer placed before them by

Mrs. Sampson and Mr. Taplow. There was sausage-meat of all sorts, every part of a pig that had been fatted at Tom's expense for family eating, and killed by the clerk of the parish, who usually combines that clerical responsibility of sacrificial duty with his more prosaic accomplishments. There was a fine round of beef too, garnished with the very last of the autumn vegetables, thanks to the gardener, who sat on the left-hand of the cook and housekeeper, facing the ecclesiastic afore-mentioned. There were a couple of handsome puddings, rather anticipating Christmas, and an equal number of magnificent pies, whilst a scarcely cut Stilton, naturally intended for kitchen use, and some early celery, adorned the sideboard. With such and such-like dainties the tables groaned, and like the Bard of Teos, though my pen would willingly linger among them, I hasten on to sing of matter more digestible, or better suited to my reader's appetite.

I do not know that a parish clerk is less capable of carrying his liquor than the vicar

or bishop: be that as it may, by the time Mr. Singer was ready to propose a toast, he was far gone in inebriety. He was not the only one. Mrs. Sampson had made good use of her time, and Joe Joines was as usual. That gentleman was remarkable for a rather weak head and strong self-sufficiency. Most of the others were in a fair way to enjoy themselves; but still required time for the full development of that species of happiness of which they were in search.

"The Queen!" said a gentleman unconnected with the chair.

"And the Prince o' Wales, and the Staghounds!" added a swell groom, who was lighting his pipe at the candle.

"In course," said Mr. Joines, "in bumpers;" upon which he swallowed a tumbler of punch, with as little shrinking as if it had been water. There came a pause after this, and, excepting a strong flirtation between Mary Gibbons and the swell groom, very little was said. The gentlemen were engaged with their pipes,

and the ladies in filling the gentlemen's glasses. Mr. Singer took care of Mrs. Sampson's and his own.

"Now, Taplow," said the latter, "what do you say to a song?"

"No objections at all, sir," said he from the bottom of the table; "only respect the ladies; a sentiment pr'aps would be better?"

"Never mind us, Mr. Taplow; we're all fond of music," said Mrs. Sampson.

"Then let's have 'The Great Mogul' at once, Perrin; out with it."

"And so he did; and excepting for one verse, in which were some peculiarities which belong rather to eastern households than English ones, the ladies had no cause to blush.

Then Miss Gibbons favoured the company with 'The Lass of Richmond Hill;' and one of the keepers sang 'Little Pigs.'

It was voted low, though Mrs. Sampson joined in the chorus, and the housemaid hid her blushes on the shoulders of the groom. Time was getting on; another

brew of punch was called for. The carpenter was nearly asleep, with his head on his breast, and his spoon in his mouth, which he had replaced by his pipe in his tumbler: and the clerk was making love to Mrs. Sampson in a manner which she resented by filling him bumper after bumper, and drinking about one-third of each potion before handing it to him. Charming interchange of feeling!

At length it became necessary to propose the toast of the evening. Mr. Singer was once more on his legs, and it was very evident that he had some difficulty in keeping there. With considerable incoherence he began,—

"I rise with difficulty, gents; beg pardon, ladies; no, ladies and gents, to propose a-a-rate, that is, a-a-toast; the toast, I'm bould to say, of the—the evening. We aven't, none on us, I believe, the pleasure of the acquaintance of the young squire, Mr. Crack-crack-en ('Crackenthorpe,' said Taplow). I beg pardon, Crackemall; but no doubt he'll prove wery agreeable. We

shall like him, and, in course, he'll like us. Yes! gents, we shall get on uncommon well together, I des say. I don't say as he ain't his faults; all on us has. There's Joines: there ain't a better feller in existence, but he's fond of his liquor, fond of his liquor. We've all on us faults, and so has Mr. What's his name, Crack, Cracken something. Lor! bless me how my memory do fail me, to be sure! Well! he's his faults. His beer ain't no ways so good as it ought to be. But what I say is this, as he ought to be supported as long as he lives with such uncommon kind and—and —liberal people as has entertained us here to-night. I never see anything ansomer; our westry dinners is nothin' to what we've seen this evening. What I says then (hiccup) is this: As Mrs. Sampson's a regular trump, and Taplow the loveliest of his sex; no, I mean (here the hammering on the table drowned the explanation); and I propose health and success to this establishment, and begs to couple with it the names of Mr. and Mrs. Sampson—I mean Mr.

Sampson and Mrs. Taplow—with, let me see, nine times nine."

"Eighty-one," said Mr. Joines, who had just been roused by the knocking of tables and jingling of glasses.

"So fill up rum 'uns, bumpers (hiccup) I mean:" and with that he mounted the chair; and Mr. Joines, not to be outdone, the table.

How many of the rounds had been got through I don't know, but in the middle of it two figures appeared in the doorway, muffled up in pea-jackets, with their hats on. They walked deliberately up to the table, and, seizing the spokesman and his abettor, sent them flying on to their backs in the middle of the room, amidst a general rising of the company and a breaking of glass, where they remained perfectly insensible. It's the last feather that breaks the camel's back.

"Taplow."

"Yes, sir:" for he recognised the voice of his returned master

"Did you get my letter?"

"No, sir."

"Who are those noisy blackguards?"

"One's Mr. Singer and the other Mr. Joines," replied Mr. Taplow, in a subdued treble.

"What are they?" said Tom again.

"Very drunk, sir, I'm afraid."

"I know that, you old fool; I mean, *what* are they?"

"One's the clerk, and other's the carpenter, sir."

"Then go into the stable-yard, get Drinkwater to give you two wheelbarrows and two sober helpers, and wheel them home, and then bring me something to eat. This is more like Bedlam than a gentleman's house."

Instead of wheeling them home, Mr. Drinkwater, who was a sound churchman, ordered them up to the Vicarage, where, having propped them against the door and rung the bell, he left them to themselves. When the door opened they fell into the arms of the Vicar, who was just about retiring for the night. He spent a pleasant

hour or two in endeavouring to resuscitate them, and eventually sent for the doctor. Crackenthorpe had a long confab with Mr. Taplow before retiring to rest; and Mrs. Sampson was requested to find another place that day month.

END OF VOL. I.

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